



P.O. angl. 373 ^h—

~~scara~~
(Shakespeare)

12/-

Montagu

~~#425~~

KL

Kampen

Jurman & Neelen
1875. Dec: 5th


<36622484900011

S

<36622484900011

Bayer. Staatsbibliothek



AN
ESSAY
ON THE
WRITINGS AND GENIUS
OF
SHAKSPEARE,
COMPARED WITH THE
GREEK AND FRENCH
Dramatic Poets.

WITH
SOME REMARKS
UPON THE MISREPRESENTATIONS OF
Mons. de VOLTAIRE.

THE SIXTH EDITION, CORRECTED.
TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
Three Dialogues of the Dead.

By MRS. MONTAGU.

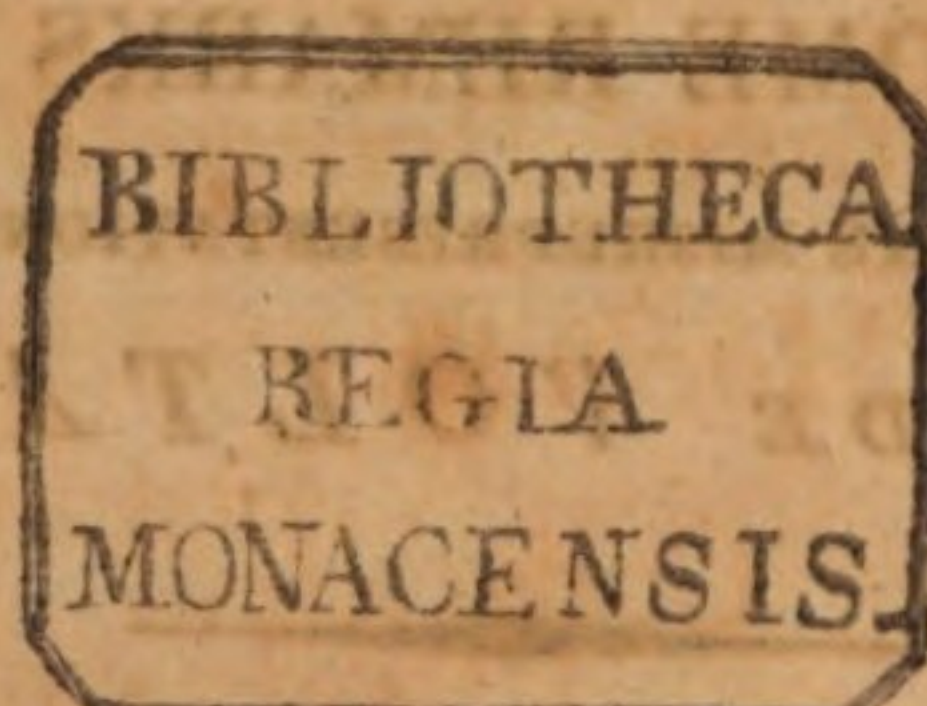
LONDON:

Printed by Harding and Wright, St. John's-square,
FOR R. PRIESTLEY, 143, HIGH-HOLBORN; AND
R. LEA, GREEK-STREET, SOHO.

1810.

AN
ESSAY
ON THE
WRITINGS AND GENIUS
OF
SHAKSPEARE

COMPARED WITH THE
GREEK AND FRENCH
DRAMATIC POETS



THE SIXTH EDITION, CORRECTED,
TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
Three Dialogues of the Dead.

By Mrs. MONTAGU.

LONDON:

Printed by Harding and Wilson, St. John's-square,
for A. BARNARD, 143, NINE-HOLBORN; AND
W. LEA, GREEN-STREET, BOND.

1810.

C O N T E N T S.

I NTRODUCTION.	-	Page v.
<i>On Dramatic Poetry.</i>	-	P. 3.
<i>On the Historical Drama.</i>	-	P. 33.
<i>The First Part of Henry IV.</i>	-	P. 69.
<i>The Second Part of Henry IV.</i>	-	P. 93.
<i>On the Præternatural Beings.</i>	-	P. 115.
<i>The Tragedy of Macbeth.</i>	-	P. 155.
<i>Upon the Cinna of Corneille.</i>	-	P. 187.
<i>Upon the Death of Julius Cæsar.</i>	-	P. 223.

THREE DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD.

<i>Dialogue I.</i>	-	P. 267.
<i>Dialogue II.</i>	-	P. 276.
<i>Dialogue III.</i>	-	P. 282.

CONTENTS

Introduction. Page v.

On Dramatic Poetry. P. 3.

On the Historical Drama. P. 83.

The First Part of Henry IV. P. 60.

The Second Part of Henry IV. P. 93.

On the Poetical Natural History. P. 113.

The Tragedy of Macbeth. P. 153.

Upon the Canna of Cornucopia. P. 187.

Upon the Death of Julius Caesar. P. 223.

THREE DIALOGUES ON THE DEAD.

Dialogue I. P. 267.

Dialogue II. P. 276.

Dialogue III. P. 283.

INTRODUCTION.

MR. POPE, in the preface to his edition of Shakspeare, sets out with declaring, that, of all English poets, this author offers the fullest and fairest subject for criticism. Animated by an opinion of such authority, some of the most learned and ingenious of our critics have made correct editions of his works, and enriched them with notes. The superiority of talents and learning, which I acknowledge in these editors, leaves me no room to entertain the vain presumption of attempting to correct any passages of this celebrated Author; but the whole, as corrected and elucidated by them, lies open to a thorough enquiry into the genius of our great English classic. Unprejudiced and candid judgment will be the surest basis of his fame. But he seems now in danger of incurring the fate of the heroes of the fabulous ages, on whom the vanity of their country, and the superstition

superstition of the times, bestowed an apotheosis founded on pretensions to achievements beyond human capacity, by which they lost, in a more sceptical and critical age, the glory due to them for what they had really done ; and all the veneration they had obtained, was ascribed to ignorant credulity, and national prepossession. — Our Shakspeare, whose very faults pass here unquestioned, or are perhaps consecrated through the enthusiasm of his admirers, and the veneration paid to long-established fame, is by a great wit, a great critic, and a great poet of a neighbouring nation, treated as a writer of monstrous farces, called by him Tragedies ; and barbarism and ignorance are attributed to the nation, by which he is admired. Yet if wits, poets, critics, could ever be charged with presumption, one might say there was some degree of it in pronouncing, that, in a country where Sophocles and Euripides are as well understood as in any part of Europe, the perfections of dramatic poetry should be as little comprehended as among the Chinese.

Learning

Learning here is not confined to ecclesiastics, or a few lettered sages and academics : every English gentleman has an education, which gives him an early acquaintance with the writings of the ancients. His knowledge of polite literature does not begin with that period, which Mr. de Voltaire calls *le Siècle de Louis quatorze*. Before he is admitted as a spectator at the theatre in London, it is probable he has already heard the tragic muse as she spoke at Athens, and as she now speaks at Paris, or in Italy ; and he can discern between the natural language, in which she once addressed the human heart, and the artificial dialect which she has acquired from the prejudices of a particular nation, or the jargon caught from the tone of a court. In order to please upon the French stage, every person of every age and nation was made to adopt French manners.

The heroes of antiquity were not more disguised in the romances of Calprenede and Scuderi, than in the tragedies of Corneille. In spite of the admonitions given by that admirable

ble critic Boileau to their dramatic writers in the following lines :

Gardez donc de donner, ainsi que dans Clélie,
L'air ni l'esprit François à l'antique Italie ;
Et sous des noms Romains faissant notre portrait,
Peindre Caton galant, & Brutus damoret :

the Horatii are represented no less obsequious in their address to their king, than the courtiers of the grand monarque. Theseus is made a mere sighing swain. Many of the greatest men of antiquity, and even the roughest heroes amongst the Goths and Vandals, are exhibited in this effeminate form. The poet dignified the piece, perhaps, with the name of an Hercules ; but, alas ! it was always Hercules spinning, that was shewn to the spectator. And yet the editor of Corneille's works, in terms so gross as are hardly pardonable in such a master of fine railery, frequently attacks our Shakspeare for the want of delicacy and politeness in his pieces. It must be owned, that in some places they bear the marks of the unpolished times in which he wrote ; but one cannot forbear smiling to hear a
critic,

critic, who professes himself an admirer of the tragedies of Corneille, object to the barbarism of Shakspeare's. There never was a more barbarous mode of writing than that of the French romances in the last age, nor which, from its tediousness, languor, and want of truth of character, is less fit to be copied on the stage: and what are most parts of Corneille's boasted tragedies, but the romantic dialogue, its tedious soliloquy, and its extravagant sentiments, in the true Gothic livery of rhyme?

The French poets assume a superiority over Shakspeare, on account of their more constant adherence to Aristotle's unities of time and place.

The pedant who bought at a great price the lamp of a famous philosopher, expecting that by its assistance his lucubrations would become equally celebrated, was little more absurd than those poets, who suppose their dramas must be excellent, if they are regulated by Aristotle's clock. To bring within a limited time, and an

assigned space, a series of conversations (and French plays are little more) is no difficult matter ; for of every art perhaps, and in poetry without dispute, that is the easiest part in which the connoisseur can direct the artist.

I do not suppose the critic imagined that a mere obedience to his laws of drama would make a good tragedy, though it might prevent a poet more bold than judicious, from writing a very absurd one. A painter can define the just proportion of the human body, and the anatomist knows what muscles constitute the strength of the limbs ; but grace of motion, and exertion of strength, depend on the mind, which animates the form. The critic but fashions the body of a work ; the poet must add the soul, which gives force and direction to its actions and gestures : when one of these critics has attempted to finish a work by his own rules, he has rarely been able to convey into it one spark of divine fire ; and the hero of his piece, whom he designed for a man, remains a cold inanimate statue ; which, moving on the wood and wire

INTRODUCTION.

xi

of the great masters in the mechanical part of the drama, presents to the spectators a kind of heroic puppet-show. As these pieces take their rise in the school of criticism, they return thither again, and are as good subjects for the students in that art, as a dead body to the professors in anatomy. Most minutely too have they been anatomized in learned academies: but works, animated by genius, will not abide this kind of dissection.

Mr. Pope says, that, in order to form a judgment of Shakspeare's works, we are not to apply to the rules of Aristotle, which would be like trying a man by the laws of one country, who lived under those of another.—Heaven-born genius acts from something superior to rules, and antecedent to rules; and has a right of appeal to nature herself.

Great indulgence is due to the errors of original writers, who, quitting the beaten track which others have travelled, make daring incursions into unexplored regions of invention, and

boldly strike into the pathless Sublime : it is no wonder if they are often bewildered, sometimes benighted : yet surely it is more eligible to partake the pleasure and the hazard of their adventures, than still to follow the cautious steps of timid imitators through trite and common roads. Genius is of a bold enterprizing nature, ill adapted to the formal restraints of critic institutions, or indeed to lay down to itself rules of nice discretion. If perfect and faultless composition is ever to be expected from human faculties, it must be at some happy period, when a noble and graceful simplicity, the result of well regulated and sober magnanimity, reigns through the general manners. Then the Muses and the Arts, neither effeminately delicate, nor audaciously bold, assume their highest character, and in all their compositions seem to respect the chastity of the public taste, which would equally disdain quaintness of ornament, or the rude neglect of elegance and decorum. Such periods had Greece, had Rome ! Then were produced immortal works of every kind ! But when the living manners degenerated, in vain did an

Aristotle and a Quintilian endeavour to restore by doctrine, what had been inspired by sentiment, and fashioned by manners.

If the severer muses, whose sphere is the library and the senate, are obliged, in complaisance to this degeneracy, to trick themselves out with meretricious and frivolous ornaments, as is too apparent from the compositions of the historians and orators in declining empires ; can we wonder that a dramatic poet, whose chief interest it is to please the people, should, more than any other writer, conform himself to their humour ; and appear more strongly infected with the faults of the times, whether they be such as belong to unpolished, or corrupted taste ?

Shakspeare wrote at a time, when learning was tinctured with pedantry ; wit was unpolished, and mirth ill-bred. The court of Elizabeth spoke a scientific jargon, and a certain obscurity of style was universally affected. James brought an addition of pedantry, accompanied by

by indecent and indelicate manners and language. By contagion, or from complaisance to the taste of the public, Shakspeare falls sometimes into the fashionable mode of writing : but this is only by fits ; for many parts of all his plays are written with the most noble, elegant, and uncorrupted simplicity. Such is his merit, that, the more just and refined the taste of the nation is become, the more he has increased in reputation. He was approved by his own age, admired by the next, and is revered, and almost adored by the present. His merit is disputed by little wits, and his errors are the jests of little critics ; but there has not been a great poet, or great critic, since his time, who has not spoken of him with the highest veneration, Mr. Voltaire alone excepted ; whose translations often, whose criticisms still oftener, prove he did not perfectly understand the words of the Author ; and therefore it is certain he could not enter into his meaning. He comprehended enough to perceive that Shakspeare was unobservant of some established rules of composition ; the felicity, with which he performs what no rules can teach,

teach, escapes him. Will an intelligent spectator not admire the prodigious structures of Stone-Henge, because he does not know by what law of mechanics they were raised? Like them, our Author's works will remain for ever the greatest monuments of the amazing force of nature, which we ought to view as we do other prodigies, with an attention to, and admiration of their stupendous parts, and proud irregularity of greatness.

It has been already declared, that Shakspeare is not to be tried by any code of critic laws; nor is it more equitable to judge him entirely by the practice of any particular theatre. Yet some criterion must be established by which we may determine his merits. First, we must take into consideration what is proposed to be done by the means of dramatic imitation. Every species of poetry has its distinct offices. The effecting certain moral purposes, by the representation of a fable, seems to have been the universal intention, from the first institution of the Drama to this time; and to have prevailed,
not

by indecent and indelicate manners and language. By contagion, or from complaisance to the taste of the public, Shakspeare falls sometimes into the fashionable mode of writing : but this is only by fits ; for many parts of all his plays are written with the most noble, elegant, and uncorrupted simplicity. Such is his merit, that, the more just and refined the taste of the nation is become, the more he has increased in reputation. He was approved by his own age, admired by the next, and is revered, and almost adored by the present. His merit is disputed by little wits, and his errors are the jests of little critics ; but there has not been a great poet, or great critic, since his time, who has not spoken of him with the highest veneration, Mr. Voltaire alone excepted ; whose translations often, whose criticisms still oftener, prove he did not perfectly understand the words of the Author ; and therefore it is certain he could not enter into his meaning. He comprehended enough to perceive that Shakspeare was unobservant of some established rules of composition ; the felicity, with which he performs what no rules can teach,

teach, escapes him. Will an intelligent spectator not admire the prodigious structures of Stone-Henge, because he does not know by what law of mechanics they were raised? Like them, our Author's works will remain for ever the greatest monuments of the amazing force of nature, which we ought to view as we do other prodigies, with an attention to, and admiration of their stupendous parts, and proud irregularity of greatness.

It has been already declared, that Shakspeare is not to be tried by any code of critic laws; nor is it more equitable to judge him entirely by the practice of any particular theatre. Yet some criterion must be established by which we may determine his merits. First, we must take into consideration what is proposed to be done by the means of dramatic imitation. Every species of poetry has its distinct offices. The effecting certain moral purposes, by the representation of a fable, seems to have been the universal intention, from the first institution of the Drama to this time; and to have prevailed,
not

not only in Europe, but in all countries where the dramatic art has been attempted. It has indeed been the common aim of all poetry to please and instruct; but by means as various as the kinds of composition. We are pleased with the ode, the elegy, the eclogue; not only for having invention, spirit, elegance, and such perfections as are necessary to recommend any sort of poetry, but we also require that each should have its specific merit; the ode, that which constitutes the perfection of an ode, &c. In these views, then, our Author is to be examined:—First, whether his fables answer the noblest end of fable, moral instruction; next, whether his dramatic imitation has its proper dramatic excellence. In the latter of these articles, perhaps, there is not any thing will more assist our judgment than a candid comparison (where the nature of the subjects will bear it) between his, and some other celebrated dramatic compositions. It is idle to refer to a vague, unrealized idea of perfection: we may safely pronounce that to be well executed, in any art, which, after the repeated efforts of great geniuses, is equal to any thing

thing which has been produced. We may securely applaud what the ancients have crowned, therefore should not withhold our approbation wherever we find our countryman has equalled the most admired passages in the Greek tragedians ; but we shall not do justice to his native talents, when they are the object of consideration, if we do not remember the different circumstances under which these writings were composed. Shakspeare's plays were to be acted in a paltry tavern, to an unlettered audience, just emerging from barbarity : the Greek tragedies were to be exhibited at the public charge, under the care and auspices of the magistrates, at Athens ; where the very populace were critics in wit, and connoisseurs in public spectacles. The period when Sophocles and Euripides wrote, was that in which the fine arts, and polite literature, were in a degree of perfection which succeeding ages have emulated in vain.

It happened in the literary as in the moral world ; a few sages, from the veneration which they had obtained by extraordinary wisdom,
and

and a faultless conduct, rose to the authority of legislators. The practice and manner of the three celebrated Greek tragedians were by succeeding critics established as dramatic laws: happily for Shakspeare, Mr. Johnson, whose genius and learning render him superior to a servile awe of pedantic institutions, in his ingenious preface to his edition of Shakspeare, has well obviated all that can be objected to our Author's neglect of the unities of time and place.

Shakspeare's felicity has been rendered complete in this age. His genius produced works that time could not destroy: but some of the lighter characters were become illegible; these have been restored by critics, whose learning and penetration have traced back the vestiges of superannuated opinions and customs. They are now no longer in danger of being effaced, and the testimony of these learned commentators to his merit, will guard our Author's great monument of human wit from the presumptuous invasions of our rash critics, and the squibs of our witlings;

witlings ; so that the bays will for ever flourish unwithered and inviolate round his tomb ; and his very spirit seems to come forth and to animate his characters, as often as Mr. Garrick, who acts with the same inspiration with which he wrote, assumes them on the stage.

After our Poet has received such important services from the united efforts of talents and learning in his behalf, some apology seems necessary for this work. But let it be remembered, that the most superb and lasting monument that ever was consecrated to Beauty, was that to which every lover carried a tribute. I dare hope to do him honour only by augmenting the heap of volumes given by his admirers to his memory. I will own, I was incited to this undertaking by great admiration of his genius, and still greater indignation at the treatment he has received from a French wit, who seems to think he has made prodigious concessions to our prejudices in favour of the works of our countryman, in allowing them the credit of a few splendid passages, while he speaks of every en-
tire

tire piece as a monstrous and ill-constructed farce. —Ridiculously has our Poet, and ridiculously has our taste been represented, by a writer of universal fame ; and through the medium of an almost universal language. Superficial criticisms hit the level of shallow minds, to whom a *bon mot* will appear reason, and an epigrammatic turn, argument ; so that many of our countrymen have hastily adopted this lively writer's opinion of the extravagance, and total want of design in Shakspeare's dramas. With the more learned, deep, and sober critics, however, he lies under one considerable disadvantage. For, copying nature, as he found it, in the busy walks of human life, he drew from an original, with which the Literati are seldom well acquainted. They perceive his portraits are not of the Grecian or of the Roman school ; so that, after finding them unlike to the dignified characters preserved in learned museums, they do not deign to enquire, whether they resemble the living persons, they were intended to represent. Among these connoisseurs, whose acquaintance with mankind is formed in the library, not in the street, the

the camp, or village, whatever is unpolished and uncouth, passes for fantastic and absurd, though, in fact, it is a faithful representation of a really existing character.

But it must be acknowledged, that, when this objection is obviated, there will yet remain another cause of censure; for though our Author, from want of delicacy, or from a desire to please the popular taste, thought he had done well, when he faithfully copied nature, or represented customs, it will appear to politer times, the error of an untutored mind, which the example of judicious artists, and the admonitions of delicate connoisseurs had not taught,—that only graceful nature and decent customs give proper subjects for imitation. It may be said in mitigation of his fault, that the vulgar here had not, as at Athens, been used to behold,

Gorgeous tragedy
In scepter'd pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine.

Homer's

Homer's works alone were sufficient to teach the Greek poets how to write, and their audience how to judge. The songs sung by our bards at feasts and merry-makings, were of a very coarse kind ; as the people were totally illiterate, and the better sort alone could read even their mother tongue, their taste was formed on these compositions. As yet our stage had exhibited only those palpable allegories, by which rude unlettered moralists instruct and please the gross and ignorant multitude. Nothing can more plainly evince the opinion, the poets of those times had of the ignorance of the people, than the condescension shewn to it by the learned earl of Dorset, in his tragedy of Gorboduc ; in which the moral of each act is represented on the stage in dumb shew. It is therefore strange that Mr. de Voltaire, who affects an impartial and philosophic spirit, should not rather speak with admiration, than contempt, of an author, who by the force of genius rose so much above the age and circumstances in which he was born, and who, even when he deviates most from rules, *can rise to faults true critics dare not mend.*

mend. In delineating characters he must be allowed very far to surpass all dramatic writers, and even Homer himself; he gives an air of reality to every thing, and, in spite of many and great faults, effects, better than any one has ever done, the chief purposes of theatrical representation. It avails little to prove, that the means by which he effects them are not those prescribed in any Art of Poetry. While we feel the power and energy of his predominant genius, shall we not be apt to treat the cold formal precepts of the Critic, with the same peevish contempt, that the good lady in the Guardian, smarting in the anguish of a burn, does her son's pedantic intrusion of Mr. Lock's doctrine, to prove that there is no heat in fire? Nature and sentiment will pronounce our Shakspeare a mighty genius; judgment and taste will confess, that as a writer he is far from being faultless.

ON

DRAMATIC POETRY.

B

superstition of the times, bestowed an apotheosis founded on pretensions to achievements beyond human capacity, by which they lost, in a more sceptical and critical age, the glory due to them for what they had really done ; and all the veneration they had obtained, was ascribed to ignorant credulity, and national prepossession. — Our Shakspeare, whose very faults pass here unquestioned, or are perhaps consecrated through the enthusiasm of his admirers, and the veneration paid to long-established fame, is by a great wit, a great critic, and a great poet of a neighbouring nation, treated as a writer of monstrous farces, called by him Tragedies ; and barbarism and ignorance are attributed to the nation, by which he is admired. Yet if wits, poets, critics, could ever be charged with presumption, one might say there was some degree of it in pronouncing, that, in a country where Sophocles and Euripides are as well understood as in any part of Europe, the perfections of dramatic poetry should be as little comprehended as among the Chinese.

Learning

Learning here is not confined to ecclesiastics, or a few lettered sages and academics : every English gentleman has an education, which gives him an early acquaintance with the writings of the ancients. His knowledge of polite literature does not begin with that period, which Mr. de Voltaire calls *le Siècle de Louis quatorze*. Before he is admitted as a spectator at the theatre in London, it is probable he has already heard the tragic muse as she spoke at Athens, and as she now speaks at Paris, or in Italy ; and he can discern between the natural language, in which she once addressed the human heart, and the artificial dialect which she has acquired from the prejudices of a particular nation, or the jargon caught from the tone of a court. In order to please upon the French stage, every person of every age and nation was made to adopt French manners.

The heroes of antiquity were not more disguised in the romances of Calprenede and Scuderi, than in the tragedies of Corneille. In spite of the admonitions given by that admirable

ble critic Boileau to their dramatic writers in the following lines :

Gardez donc de donner, ainsi que dans Clélie,
L'air ni l'esprit François à l'antique Italie ;
Et sous des noms Romains faissant notre portrait,
Peindre Caton galant, & Brutus damoret :

the Horatii are represented no less obsequious in their address to their king, than the courtiers of the grand monarch. Theseus is made a mere sighing swain. Many of the greatest men of antiquity, and even the roughest heroes amongst the Goths and Vandals, are exhibited in this effeminate form. The poet dignified the piece, perhaps, with the name of an Hercules ; but, alas ! it was always Hercules spinning, that was shewn to the spectator. And yet the editor of Corneille's works, in terms so gross as are hardly pardonable in such a master of fine railery, frequently attacks our Shakspeare for the want of delicacy and politeness in his pieces. It must be owned, that in some places they bear the marks of the unpolished times in which he wrote ; but one cannot forbear smiling to hear a
critic,

critic, who professes himself an admirer of the tragedies of Corneille, object to the barbarism of Shakspeare's. There never was a more barbarous mode of writing than that of the French romances in the last age, nor which, from its tediousness, languor, and want of truth of character, is less fit to be copied on the stage: and what are most parts of Corneille's boasted tragedies, but the romantic dialogue, its tedious soliloquy, and its extravagant sentiments, in the true Gothic livery of rhyme?

The French poets assume a superiority over Shakspeare, on account of their more constant adherence to Aristotle's unities of time and place.

The pedant who bought at a great price the lamp of a famous philosopher, expecting that by its assistance his lucubrations would become equally celebrated, was little more absurd than those poets, who suppose their dramas must be excellent, if they are regulated by Aristotle's clock. To bring within a limited time, and an

assigned space, a series of conversations (and French plays are little more) is no difficult matter ; for of every art perhaps, and in poetry without dispute, that is the easiest part in which the connoisseur can direct the artist.

I do not suppose the critic imagined that a mere obedience to his laws of drama would make a good tragedy, though it might prevent a poet more bold than judicious, from writing a very absurd one. A painter can define the just proportion of the human body, and the anatomist knows what muscles constitute the strength of the limbs ; but grace of motion, and exertion of strength, depend on the mind, which animates the form. The critic but fashions the body of a work ; the poet must add the soul, which gives force and direction to its actions and gestures : when one of these critics has attempted to finish a work by his own rules, he has rarely been able to convey into it one spark of divine fire ; and the hero of his piece, whom he designed for a man, remains a cold inanimate statue ; which, moving on the wood and wire

3

of

of the great masters in the mechanical part of the drama, presents to the spectators a kind of heroic puppet-show. As these pieces take their rise in the school of criticism, they return thither again, and are as good subjects for the students in that art, as a dead body to the professors in anatomy. Most minutely too have they been anatomized in learned academies: but works, animated by genius, will not abide this kind of dissection.

Mr. Pope says, that, in order to form a judgment of Shakspeare's works, we are not to apply to the rules of Aristotle, which would be like trying a man by the laws of one country, who lived under those of another.—Heaven-born genius acts from something superior to rules, and antecedent to rules; and has a right of appeal to nature herself.

Great indulgence is due to the errors of original writers, who, quitting the beaten track which others have travelled, make daring incursions into unexplored regions of invention, and

boldly strike into the pathless Sublime : it is no wonder if they are often bewildered, sometimes benighted : yet surely it is more eligible to partake the pleasure and the hazard of their adventures, than still to follow the cautious steps of timid imitators through trite and common roads. Genius is of a bold enterprizing nature, ill adapted to the formal restraints of critic institutions, or indeed to lay down to itself rules of nice discretion. If perfect and faultless composition is ever to be expected from human faculties, it must be at some happy period, when a noble and graceful simplicity, the result of well regulated and sober magnanimity, reigns through the general manners. Then the Muses and the Arts, neither effeminately delicate, nor audaciously bold, assume their highest character, and in all their compositions seem to respect the chastity of the public taste, which would equally disdain quaintness of ornament, or the rude neglect of elegance and decorum. Such periods had Greece, had Rome ! Then were produced immortal works of every kind ! But when the living manners degenerated, in vain did an

Aristotle and a Quintilian endeavour to restore by doctrine, what had been inspired by sentiment, and fashioned by manners.

If the severer muses, whose sphere is the library and the senate, are obliged, in complaisance to this degeneracy, to trick themselves out with meretricious and frivolous ornaments, as is too apparent from the compositions of the historians and orators in declining empires ; can we wonder that a dramatic poet, whose chief interest it is to please the people, should, more than any other writer, conform himself to their humour ; and appear more strongly infected with the faults of the times, whether they be such as belong to unpolished, or corrupted taste ?

Shakspeare wrote at a time, when learning was tinctured with pedantry ; wit was unpolished, and mirth ill-bred. The court of Elizabeth spoke a scientific jargon, and a certain obscurity of style was universally affected. James brought an addition of pedantry, accompanied by

by indecent and indelicate manners and language. By contagion, or from complaisance to the taste of the public, Shakspeare falls sometimes into the fashionable mode of writing : but this is only by fits ; for many parts of all his plays are written with the most noble, elegant, and uncorrupted simplicity. Such is his merit, that, the more just and refined the taste of the nation is become, the more he has increased in reputation. He was approved by his own age, admired by the next, and is revered, and almost adored by the present. His merit is disputed by little wits, and his errors are the jests of little critics ; but there has not been a great poet, or great critic, since his time, who has not spoken of him with the highest veneration, Mr. Voltaire alone excepted ; whose translations often, whose criticisms still oftener, prove he did not perfectly understand the words of the Author ; and therefore it is certain he could not enter into his meaning. He comprehended enough to perceive that Shakspeare was unobservant of some established rules of composition ; the felicity, with which he performs what no rules can teach

teach, escapes him. Will an intelligent spectator not admire the prodigious structures of Stone-Henge, because he does not know by what law of mechanics they were raised? Like them, our Author's works will remain for ever the greatest monuments of the amazing force of nature, which we ought to view as we do other prodigies, with an attention to, and admiration of their stupendous parts, and proud irregularity of greatness.

It has been already declared, that Shakspeare is not to be tried by any code of critic laws; nor is it more equitable to judge him entirely by the practice of any particular theatre. Yet some criterion must be established by which we may determine his merits. First, we must take into consideration what is proposed to be done by the means of dramatic imitation. Every species of poetry has its distinct offices. The effecting certain moral purposes, by the representation of a fable, seems to have been the universal intention, from the first institution of the Drama to this time; and to have prevailed,
not

not only in Europe, but in all countries where the dramatic art has been attempted. It has indeed been the common aim of all poetry to please and instruct; but by means as various as the kinds of composition. We are pleased with the ode, the elegy, the eclogue; not only for having invention, spirit, elegance, and such perfections as are necessary to recommend any sort of poetry, but we also require that each should have its specific merit; the ode, that which constitutes the perfection of an ode, &c. In these views, then, our Author is to be examined:—First, whether his fables answer the noblest end of fable, moral instruction; next, whether his dramatic imitation has its proper dramatic excellence. In the latter of these articles, perhaps, there is not any thing will more assist our judgment than a candid comparison (where the nature of the subjects will bear it) between his, and some other celebrated dramatic compositions. It is idle to refer to a vague, unrealized idea of perfection: we may safely pronounce that to be well executed, in any art, which, after the repeated efforts of great geniuses, is equal to any thing

thing which has been produced. We may securely applaud what the ancients have crowned, therefore should not withhold our approbation wherever we find our countryman has equalled the most admired passages in the Greek tragedians ; but we shall not do justice to his native talents, when they are the object of consideration, if we do not remember the different circumstances under which these writings were composed. Shakspeare's plays were to be acted in a paltry tavern, to an unlettered audience, just emerging from barbarity : the Greek tragedies were to be exhibited at the public charge, under the care and auspices of the magistrates, at Athens ; where the very populace were critics in wit, and connoisseurs in public spectacles. The period when Sophocles and Euripides wrote, was that in which the fine arts, and polite literature, were in a degree of perfection which succeeding ages have emulated in vain.

It happened in the literary as in the moral world ; a few sages, from the veneration which they had obtained by extraordinary wisdom,
and

and a faultless conduct, rose to the authority of legislators. The practice and manner of the three celebrated Greek tragedians were by succeeding critics established as dramatic laws: happily for Shakspeare, Mr. Johnson, whose genius and learning render him superior to a servile awe of pedantic institutions, in his ingenious preface to his edition of Shakspeare, has well obviated all that can be objected to our Author's neglect of the unities of time and place.

Shakspeare's felicity has been rendered complete in this age. His genius produced works that time could not destroy: but some of the lighter characters were become illegible; these have been restored by critics, whose learning and penetration have traced back the vestiges of superannuated opinions and customs. They are now no longer in danger of being effaced, and the testimony of these learned commentators to his merit, will guard our Author's great monument of human wit from the presumptuous invasions of our rash critics, and the squibs of our witlings;

witlings ; so that the bays will for ever flourish unwithered and inviolate round his tomb ; and his very spirit seems to come forth and to animate his characters, as often as Mr. Garrick, who acts with the same inspiration with which he wrote, assumes them on the stage.

After our Poet has received such important services from the united efforts of talents and learning in his behalf, some apology seems necessary for this work. But let it be remembered, that the most superb and lasting monument that ever was consecrated to Beauty, was that to which every lover carried a tribute. I dare hope to do him honour only by augmenting the heap of volumes given by his admirers to his memory. I will own, I was incited to this undertaking by great admiration of his genius, and still greater indignation at the treatment he has received from a French wit, who seems to think he has made prodigious concessions to our prejudices in favour of the works of our countryman, in allowing them the credit of a few splendid passages, while he speaks of every entire

not only in Europe, but in all countries where the dramatic art has been attempted. It has indeed been the common aim of all poetry to please and instruct; but by means as various as the kinds of composition. We are pleased with the ode, the elegy, the eclogue; not only for having invention, spirit, elegance, and such perfections as are necessary to recommend any sort of poetry, but we also require that each should have its specific merit; the ode, that which constitutes the perfection of an ode, &c.. In these views, then, our Author is to be examined:—First, whether his fables answer the noblest end of fable, moral instruction; next, whether his dramatic imitation has its proper dramatic excellence. In the latter of these articles, perhaps, there is not any thing will more assist our judgment than a candid comparison (where the nature of the subjects will bear it) between his, and some other celebrated dramatic compositions. It is idle to refer to a vague, unrealized idea of perfection: we may safely pronounce that to be well executed, in any art, which, after the repeated efforts of great geniuses, is equal to any thing

thing which has been produced. We may securely applaud what the ancients have crowned, therefore should not withhold our approbation wherever we find our countryman has equalled the most admired passages in the Greek tragedians ; but we shall not do justice to his native talents, when they are the object of consideration, if we do not remember the different circumstances under which these writings were composed. Shakspeare's plays were to be acted in a paltry tavern, to an unlettered audience, just emerging from barbarity : the Greek tragedies were to be exhibited at the public charge, under the care and auspices of the magistrates, at Athens ; where the very populace were critics in wit, and connoisseurs in public spectacles. The period when Sophocles and Euripides wrote, was that in which the fine arts, and polite literature, were in a degree of perfection which succeeding ages have emulated in vain.

It happened in the literary as in the moral world ; a few sages, from the veneration which they had obtained by extraordinary wisdom,
and

and a faultless conduct, rose to the authority of legislators. The practice and manner of the three celebrated Greek tragedians were by succeeding critics established as dramatic laws: happily for Shakspeare, Mr. Johnson, whose genius and learning render him superior to a servile awe of pedantic institutions, in his ingenious preface to his edition of Shakspeare, has well obviated all that can be objected to our Author's neglect of the unities of time and place.

Shakspeare's felicity has been rendered complete in this age. His genius produced works that time could not destroy: but some of the lighter characters were become illegible; these have been restored by critics, whose learning and penetration have traced back the vestiges of superannuated opinions and customs. They are now no longer in danger of being effaced, and the testimony of these learned commentators to his merit, will guard our Author's great monument of human wit from the presumptuous invasions of our rash critics, and the squibs of our witlings;

witlings ; so that the bays will for ever flourish unwithered and inviolate round his tomb ; and his very spirit seems to come forth and to animate his characters, as often as Mr. Garrick, who acts with the same inspiration with which he wrote, assumes them on the stage.

After our Poet has received such important services from the united efforts of talents and learning in his behalf, some apology seems necessary for this work. But let it be remembered, that the most superb and lasting monument that ever was consecrated to Beauty, was that to which every lover carried a tribute. I dare hope to do him honour only by augmenting the heap of volumes given by his admirers to his memory. I will own, I was incited to this undertaking by great admiration of his genius, and still greater indignation at the treatment he has received from a French wit, who seems to think he has made prodigious concessions to our prejudices in favour of the works of our countryman, in allowing them the credit of a few splendid passages, while he speaks of every entire

tire

tire piece as a monstrous and ill-constructed farce. —Ridiculously has our Poet, and ridiculously has our taste been represented, by a writer of universal fame ; and through the medium of an almost universal language. Superficial criticisms hit the level of shallow minds, to whom a *bon mot* will appear reason, and an epigrammatic turn, argument ; so that many of our countrymen have hastily adopted this lively writer's opinion of the extravagance, and total want of design in Shakspeare's dramas. With the more learned, deep, and sober critics, however, he lies under one considerable disadvantage. For, copying nature, as he found it, in the busy walks of human life, he drew from an original, with which the Literati are seldom well acquainted. They perceive his portraits are not of the Grecian or of the Roman school ; so that, after finding them unlike to the dignified characters preserved in learned museums, they do not deign to enquire, whether they resemble the living persons, they were intended to represent. Among these connoisseurs, whose acquaintance with mankind is formed in the library, not in the street, the

the camp, or village, whatever is unpolished and uncouth, passes for fantastic and absurd, though, in fact, it is a faithful representation of a really existing character.

But it must be acknowledged, that, when this objection is obviated, there will yet remain another cause of censure; for though our Author, from want of delicacy, or from a desire to please the popular taste, thought he had done well, when he faithfully copied nature, or represented customs, it will appear to politer times, the error of an untutored mind, which the example of judicious artists, and the admonitions of delicate connoisseurs had not taught,—that only graceful nature and decent customs give proper subjects for imitation. It may be said in mitigation of his fault, that the vulgar here had not, as at Athens, been used to behold,

Gorgeous tragedy
In scepter'd pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine.

Homer's

Homer's works alone were sufficient to teach the Greek poets how to write, and their audience how to judge. The songs sung by our bards at feasts and merry-makings, were of a very coarse kind ; as the people were totally illiterate, and the better sort alone could read even their mother tongue, their taste was formed on these compositions. As yet our stage had exhibited only those palpable allegories, by which rude unlettered moralists instruct and please the gross and ignorant multitude. Nothing can more plainly evince the opinion, the poets of those times had of the ignorance of the people, than the condescension shewn to it by the learned earl of Dorset, in his tragedy of Gorboduc ; in which the moral of each act is represented on the stage in dumb shew. It is therefore strange that Mr. de Voltaire, who affects an impartial and philosophic spirit, should not rather speak with admiration, than contempt, of an author, who by the force of genius rose so much above the age and circumstances in which he was born, and who, even when he deviates most from rules, *can rise to faults true critics dare not mend.*

mend. In delineating characters he must be allowed very far to surpass all dramatic writers, and even Homer himself; he gives an air of reality to every thing, and, in spite of many and great faults, effects, better than any one has ever done, the chief purposes of theatrical representation. It avails little to prove, that the means by which he effects them are not those prescribed in any Art of Poetry. While we feel the power and energy of his predominant genius, shall we not be apt to treat the cold formal precepts of the Critic, with the same peevish contempt, that the good lady in the Guardian, smarting in the anguish of a burn, does her son's pedantic intrusion of Mr. Lock's doctrine, to prove that there is no heat in fire? Nature and sentiment will pronounce our Shakspeare a mighty genius; judgment and taste will confess, that as a writer he is far from being faultless.

stand. In delineating characters he must be allowed very far to surpass all dramatic writers, and even Homer himself; he gives an air of reality to every thing, and, in spite of many and great faults, effects better than any one has ever done, the chief purposes of historical representation. It avails little to prove, that the means by which he effects them are not those prescribed in any Art of Poetry. While we feel the power and energy of his predominant genius, shall we not hesitate to treat the cold formal precepts of the Critics, with the same perishing contempt, that the good lady in the *Guardian*, smothering in the anguish of a burn, does her son's passionate remonstrances of Mr. Lock's doctrine, to prove that there is no heat in fire? Reason and common sense will pronounce our Shakespeare a right ex-gentle; judgment and taste will confess, that even when he is far from being faultless.

ON

DRAMATIC POETRY.

B

DRAMATIC POETRY

O N

DRAMATIC POETRY.

TO form a true judgment of the merit of any dramatic composition, we should first consider the offices and ends of the drama ; what are its pretensions, and for what purposes it assumes a manner so different from any other kind of poetical imitation. The epic poem and the tragedy, says Aristotle, are purely imitations* ; but the dramatic is an imitation of the actions of men, by the means of action itself. The epic is also an imitation of the actions of men, but it imitates by narration. The most perfect, and the best imitation, is certainly that which gives the most

* Arist. Poet. c. 1. chap. 3.

quate, lively, and faithful copy of the thing imitated. Homer was so sensible of the superior force and efficacy of the dramatic manner, that he often drops the narrative, to assume it; and Aristotle says, that for having invented the dramatic imitation, and not on account of his other excellencies only, he alone deserves the name of poet*. It is apparent therefore, how far this great critic prefers this, to every other species of imitation.

The general object of poetry, among the ancients, was the instruction of mankind, in religion, morals, philosophy, &c. To these great purposes were tuned the harps of Orpheus, Musæus, Hesiod, Callimachus, &c. Nor in Greece alone was poetry the teacher and the guardian, of the sanctities of human society. † Our Northern bards assumed the same holy offices; the same sacred character. They directed the modes of divine worship: they taught the mo-

* Chap. 4.

† Histoire des Celtes, l. 2. c. 9.

ral duties ; inspired and celebrated heroic deeds ; sung the praises of valour, and the charms of liberty ; and snatched from oblivion the bold achievements, and meritorious acts, of patriots, and of heroes. In the East, the poet veiled his inventions in mysterious allegories and divine mythology ; and rather endeavoured to raise the mind to heavenly contemplations, than to instruct it in human affairs.

In Greece, the general mother of arts, arose the mighty genius of Homer ; of whom it may be said, as it is of Socrates with relation to philosophy, that he brought poetry from heaven, to live in cities among men. The moral of the fable of the Iliad is adapted to the political state of Greece, whose various chiefs are thereby exhorted to unanimity ; the Odyssey, to the general condition of human nature : but the episodical part of his works he has enriched with mythology, physical allegory, the fine arts, and whatever adorns the mind of man, or benefits society ; even
rules

rules of domestic œconomy, social behaviour, and all the sweet civilities of life, are taught by this great master, of what may be called, in the most enlarged sense, the humanities. Yet first in the rank of all the eminent perfections of this unequalled bard is the invention of the dramatic imitation placed, by a critic, whose judgment was formed by philosophy, and a deep knowledge of human nature. He saw the powerful agency of living words, joined to moving things, when still narration yields the place to animated action.

It is as a moral philosopher, not as the mere connoisseur in a polite art, that Aristotle gives the preference, above all other modes of poetic imitation, to tragedy, as capable to purge the passions, by the means of pity and terror*. The object of the epic poem is to inspire magnanimity; to give good documents of life; to induce

* Chap.

good habits* ; and like a wholesome regimen, to preserve the whole moral œconomy in a certain soundness and integrity. But it is not composed of ingredients of such efficacy, as to mitigate the violent distempers of the mind, nor can apply its art to the benefit of the ignorant vulgar, where those distempers are in their most exasperated state. An epic poem is too abstruse for the people ; the moral is too much enveloped, the language too elevated for their apprehension ; nor have they leisure, or application, to trace the consequences of ill-governed passions, or erroneous principles, through the long series of a voluminous work. The Drama is happily constituted for this purpose. Events are brought within the compass of a short period : precepts are delivered in the familiar way of discourse : the fiction is concealed, the allegory is realized ; and representation and action take the place of cold unaffecting narration. A tragedy

* Du Poëme Epique, par Bossu, l. 2. c. 17.

is a fable exhibited to the view, and rendered palpable to the senses ; and every decoration of the stage is contrived to impose the delusion on the spectator, by conspiring with the imitation. It is addressed to the imagination, through which it opens to itself a communication with the heart, where it is to excite certain passions and affections ; each character being personated, and each event exhibited, the attention of the audience is greatly captivated, and the imagination so far assists in the delusion, as to sympathize in the representation. To the Muse of Tragedy, therefore, Mr. Pope has assigned the noble task,

To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
To raise the genius, and to mend the heart ;
To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold.

He ascribes such power to a well-wrought scene, as to ask,

When Cato groans, who does not wish to bleed ?

He

He would not have supposed the death of Hector, or Sarpedon, could have produced an equal effect on any reader of the Iliad; such enthusiasm is to be caught only from the stage, and is the effect alone of strong-working sympathy, and passions agitated by the peculiar force and activity of the dramatic manner. Writers of feeble genius, in their compositions for the stage, frequently deviate into the narrative and descriptive style ; a fault for which nothing can atone ; for the Drama is a species of poetry, as distinct from the Epic, as Statuary from Painting; and can no more claim that merit which specifically belongs to it, and constitutes its perfection, from fine versification, or any other poetical ornaments, than a statue can be rendered a fine specimen of sculpture, from being beautifully coloured, or highly polished. It is frivolous and idle, therefore, to insist on any little incidental and accessory beauties, where the main part, the very constitution of the thing, is defective. Yet on such trivial beauties do the French found all their pretensions

tensions to superiority and excellence in the Drama.

According to Aristotle, there can be no tragedy without action*. Mr. Voltaire confesses, that some of the most admired tragedies in France, are rather conversations, than representations of an action. It will hardly be allowed to those who fail in the most essential part of an art, to set up their performances as models. Can they who have robbed the Tragic Muse of all her virtue, and divested her of whatsoever gives her a real interest in the human heart, require, we should adore her for the glitter of a few false brilliants, or the nice arrangement of frippery ornaments? If she wears any thing of intrinsic value, it has been borrowed from the ancients; but by these artists it is so fantastically fashioned to modern modes, as to lose all its original graces, and even that necessary qualification of all ornaments, fitness and propriety. A

* Arist. chap. vi.

French tragedy is a tissue of declamations, and laboured recitals of the catastrophe, by which the spirit of the Drama is greatly weakened and enervated, and the theatrical piece is deprived of that peculiar influence over the mind, which it derives from the vivid force of representation.

*Segniùs irritant animos demissa per aurem,
Quàm quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.*

The business of the Drama is to excite sympathy; and its effect on the spectator depends on such a justness of imitation, as shall cause, to a certain degree, the same passions and affections, as if what was exhibited were real. We have observed narrative imitation to be too faint and feeble a means to excite passion: declamation, still worse, plays idly on the surface of the subject, and makes the poet, who should be concealed in the action, visible to the spectator. In many works of art, our pleasure arises from a reflection on the art
itself;

itself; and in a comparison, drawn by the mind, between the original and the copy before us. But here the art and the artist must not appear; for, as often as we recur to the Poet, so often our sympathy with the action on the stage is suspended. The pompous declamations of the French theatre are mere rhetorical flourishes, such as an uninterested person might make on the state of the persons in the drama. They assume the office of the spectator by expressing his feelings, instead of conveying to us the strong emotions and sensations of the persons under the pressure of distress. Experience informs us, that even the inarticulate groans and involuntary convulsions of a creature in agonies, affect us much more, than any eloquent and elaborate description of its situation, delivered in the properest words, and most significant gestures. Our pity is then attendant on the passions of the unhappy person, and on his own sense of his misfortunes. From description, from the report of a spectator, we may make some conjecture of his internal

ternal state of mind, and so far we shall be moved: but the direct and immediate way to the heart is by the sufferer's expression of his passion. As there may be some obscurity in what I have said on this subject, I will endeavour to illustrate the doctrine by examples.

Sophocles, in his admirable tragedy of *Œdipus Coloneus*, makes *Œdipus* expostulate with his undutiful son. The injured parent exposes the enormity of filial disobedience; sets forth the duties of this relation in a very strong and lively manner; but it is only by the vehemence with which he speaks of them, and the imprecations he utters against the delinquent son, that we can guess at the violence of his emotions; therefore he excites more indignation at the conduct of *Polynices*, than sympathy with his own sorrow; of which we can judge only as spectators: for he has explained to us merely the external duties and relations of parent and child. The pangs of paternal
tenderness,

tenderness, thus wounded, are more pathetically expressed by King Lear, who leaves out whatever of this enormity is equally sensible to the spectator, and immediately exposes to us his own internal feelings, when, in the bitterness of his soul, cursing his daughter's offspring, he adds:

That she may feel,
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is,
To have a thankless child.

By this we perceive, how deeply paternal affection is wounded by filial ingratitude.

In the play of King John, the legate offers many arguments of consolation to Constance, on the loss of Arthur; they appear, to the spectator, reasonable, till she so strongly expresses the peculiar tenderness of maternal love, by answering,

He speaks to me that never had a son.

One might be made to conceive, in some
degree,

degree, the horrors of a murderer, under whose knife the bleeding victim is expiring in agonies, by a description of the unhappy object; but how fully, and how forcibly is the consciousness of guilt expressed by Macbeth, when, speaking of the grooms who lay near Duncan, he says,

MACBETH.

One cry'd, God bless us! and Amen! the other;
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands,
Listening their fear. I could not say, Amen,
When they did say, God bless us!

These expressions open to us the internal state of the persons interested, and never fail to command our sympathy. Shakspeare seems to have had the art of the Dervise, in the Arabian Tales, who could throw his soul into the body of another man, and be at once possessed of his sentiments, adopt his passions, and rise to all the functions and feelings of his situation.

Shakspeare was born in a rank of life, in
which

which men indulge themselves in a free expression of their passions, with little regard to exterior appearance. This perhaps made him more acquainted with the emotions of the heart, and less knowing or observant of outward forms: against the one he often offends, he very rarely misrepresents the other. The French tragedians, on the contrary, attend not to the nature of the man, whom they represent, but to the decorums of his rank: so that their best tragedies are made ridiculous, by changing the condition of the persons of the drama; which could not be so easily effected if they spoke the language of passion, which in all ranks of men is much alike. This kind of exterior representation falls entirely short of the intention of the Drama: and indeed many plays are little more than poems rehearsed; and the theatrical decorations are used rather to improve the spectacle, than to assist the drama, of which the poet remains the apparent hero. We are told by a French critic, that the great pleasure of a French audience

arises

arises from a reflection on the difficulty of rhyming in that language.—If that be the case, it is plain neither the French tragedians endeavour at, nor their audience expect from them, the true perfections of the Drama. For, by the same rule, if Hercules was represented under the difficulties of performing any of the tasks enjoined by Eurystheus, the attention of the audience would not be engaged so much to the means by which he achieved his heroic labours, as to the sweat and toil of the poet, in his closet, in assorting male and female rhymes. We have already remarked, that the more we revert from the stage to the poet, the less we shall be affected by what is acted ; and therefore if the difficulty of rhyme, and its apparent difference from the common language of dialogue, be such, as continually to set the art and the artist before our eyes, the specific merit of a piece intended to conceal the poet, and represent certain persons and events, does not, in any degree, exist in such compositions. Sophocles certainly unfolds the fatal

C

mystery

which men indulge themselves in a free expression of their passions, with little regard to exterior appearance. This perhaps made him more acquainted with the emotions of the heart, and less knowing or observant of outward forms: against the one he often offends, he very rarely misrepresents the other. The French tragedians, on the contrary, attend not to the nature of the man, whom they represent, but to the decorums of his rank: so that their best tragedies are made ridiculous, by changing the condition of the persons of the drama; which could not be so easily effected if they spoke the language of passion, which in all ranks of men is much alike. This kind of exterior representation falls entirely short of the intention of the Drama: and indeed many plays are little more than poems rehearsed; and the theatrical decorations are used rather to improve the spectacle, than to assist the drama, of which the poet remains the apparent hero. We are told by a French critic, that the great pleasure of a French audience arises

arises from a reflection on the difficulty of rhyming in that language.—If that be the case, it is plain neither the French tragedians endeavour at, nor their audience expect from them, the true perfections of the Drama. For, by the same rule, if Hercules was represented under the difficulties of performing any of the tasks enjoined by Eurystheus, the attention of the audience would not be engaged so much to the means by which he achieved his heroic labours, as to the sweat and toil of the poet, in his closet, in assorting male and female rhymes. We have already remarked, that the more we revert from the stage to the poet, the less we shall be affected by what is acted ; and therefore if the difficulty of rhyme, and its apparent difference from the common language of dialogue, be such, as continually to set the art and the artist before our eyes, the specific merit of a piece intended to conceal the poet, and represent certain persons and events, does not, in any degree, exist in such compositions. Sophocles certainly unfolds the fatal

C

mystery

mystery of the birth of Œdipus, with great art: but our interest in the play arises not from reflection on the conduct of the poet, but is the effect of his making us alternately hope and fear for this guiltless, unhappy man. We wait with trembling expectation for the answer of the oracle, and for the testimony of Phorbas, because we imagine that the destiny of Œdipus, and the fate of Thebes, depend on them; if we considered it merely as the contrivance of the poet, we should be as unconcerned at the unravelling of the plot, as about the explication of a riddle.

The affectation of elaborate art is certainly among the false refinements of the modern Stage.—The first masters in theatrical representations made use of a diction, which united the harmony of verse to the easy and natural air of prose, and was suited to the movement and bustle of action, being considered only as subservient to the fable, and not as the principal object of the poet or the audience.

The

The first endeavour of the poet should be to touch the heart, the next to mend it. What would the ancients say, who would not suffer even the inarticulate sounds of music to utter tones that might enervate the mind, if they could hear the stage, from whence issued precepts that awakened the magistrate, animated the chief, and improved the citizen, now giving lessons of love; and the dramatic art, no longer attempting to purge the passions by pity and terror, but by false delicacy divested of its power, and diverted from its end, melting away in the strains of elegy and eclogue? May we not venture to affirm such refinements to be rather abuse and degeneracy than advances towards perfection? These poets have plainly neglected the moral ends which were the object of the Drama: and the manner of conducting their tragedy seems no less a deviation from that which the great poets practised, and the best critics taught. If they have avoided monstrous errors and

absurdities, it is but the common privilege of mediocrity to do so; but let not mediocrity assume the airs and presumption of excellence and perfection, nor pretend to obtrude on others, as rules, any fantastical forms which affectation or fashion may have imposed on them.

It cannot be denied, but there should be some compliance with the change of manners and opinions. Our delicacy would be justly offended, if the loud groans and nauseous wounds of Philoctetes were imitated on the stage; but would good-sense be less offended, if, in the conduct of the play, his fierce resentments of his wrongs, the noble frankness of the son of Achilles, and the crafty wiles of Ulysses, which are so finely exhibited in the tragedy of Sophocles, and so deeply interest us in the dispute for the arrows, were all neglected, in order to engage our attention to some love-scenes between Neoptolemus, and a fair nymph of Lemnos? Would the poet be excused by pleading the effeminacy and gallantry

gallantry of an audience, who would not endure so unpleasing an object as a wounded man, nor attend to any contest but about a heart? In such a country the lyre should warble melting strains: but let not example teach us to fetter the energy, and enervate the noble powers of the British muse, and of a language fit to express sublimer sentiments. The bleeding, sightless eyeballs of Œdipus are objects of too great horror for the spectator; but is not Theseus, in the midst of plagues and famine, adoring *les beaux yeux* of the princess Dirce, as much an object of ridicule?

Fine dialogues of love, interwoven with a tale of incest and murder, would not have been endured in any country, where taste had not been absolutely perverted. Mr. Voltaire has the candour to own, this is a bad Tragedy; but Corneille tells us, it was his good fortune to find it the general opinion, that none of his pieces was composed with more art: so little was the dramatic art understood in the polite court of
Louis

Louis XIV. The *Œdipus* of Corneille is so far below criticism, that I should not have taken any notice of it but as it was necessary to bring a strong proof of the depravity of taste in those times.

Mr. Voltaire has endeavoured to convince his countrymen, that the metaphysics of love, and the sophistry of politics, are not adapted to the theatre: but he durst not bring the story of *Œdipus* on the stage without the addition of a love-intrigue; and *Philoctetes*, the companion of *Hercules*, is introduced sighing for the autumnal charms of *Jocasta*.—One may surely say with her.

JOCASTA.

D'un lien charmant le soin tendre & timide
Ne dut point occuper le successeur d'Alcide.

Tragedy thus converted into mere amorous ditty, drops all the ends of her institution, which were, says sir P. Sidney*,

* Defence of Poesy.

“ to

“ to open the greatest wounds, and to shew
“ forth the ulcers that are covered with
“ tissue ; to make kings fear to be tyrants,
“ tyrants to manifest their tyrannical hu-
“ mours ; that stirring the effects of ad-
“ miration and commiseration, teacheth the
“ uncertainty of this world, and upon how
“ weak foundations gilded roofs are build-
“ ed ; that maketh us know, *Qui sceptrum*
“ *sævus duro imperio regit, timet timen-*
“ *tes, metus in autorem redit.*” The ex-
ample to the great ; the warnings to the
people ; all high and public precepts, are
neglected ; and by making the interest of
the play turn upon the passion of love, to
which the man, the prince, the hero, is
made to sacrifice every other consideration,
even private morals are corrupted. Of this
we shall be perfectly convinced, if we com-
pare the conduct and sentiments of The-
seus, and of the unfortunate daughter of
Jocasta, in Antigone, and Œdipus Colo-
neus, with the Theseus and Dirce of Cor-
neille ; where the enamoured pair disclaim
all

all other regards and duties, human and divine, for the character of mere lovers. In this play, great violence is done to the character of the persons, to which Horace, and all good critics, prescribe a most exact adherence. And though the Romans, who had conquered all other nations, had the best right to prefer their own manners, and despise those of other countries, yet their critics inculcated the necessity of imitating those of the people represented.

The French tragedians not only deviate from the character of the individual represented, but even from the general character of the age and country. Theseus and Achilles are not only unlike to Theseus and Achilles, but they are not Greeks. Sophocles and Euripides never introduce a hero who had appeared in the Iliad or Odyssey, without a strict attention to make him act suitably to the opinion conceived of him from those epic poems. When Ulysses, in the tragedy of Hecuba, comes to demand Polixena to be sacrificed, how admirable is his

his conduct suited to our conceptions of him ! He is cold, prudent, deaf to pity, blind to beauty, and to be moved only by consideration of the public weal. See him in the Iphigenia of Racine, on a similar occasion, where he tells Agamemnon, *he is ready to cry,*

Je suis prêt de pleurer ;

and examine whether there appears any thing of Ulysses upon the stage, but his name. Nor is there a greater resemblance between the French and Greek Achilles. Euripides paints him with a peculiar frankness and warmth of character, abhorrent of fraud, and highly provoked when he discovers his name has been used in a deceit. When he sees Iphigenia preferring the good of her country, and an immortal fame, to the pleasures of life, he is then struck with sentiments so suitable to the greatness of his own mind ; and, in the style of a hero and a Greek, expresses how glad he should have been of such a bride. The Achilles of Racine is not distinguished from any young lover

lover of spirit; yet this is one of the best French tragedies.

It is usual to compliment Corneille with having added dignity to the Romans; and he has undoubtedly given them a certain strained elevation of sentiment and expression, which has perhaps a theatrical greatness: but this is not Roman dignity, nor suitable to the character of republicans; for, as the excellent Bishop of Cambray observes*, history represents the Romans great and high in sentiment, but simple, modest, natural in words, and very unlike the bombast, turgid heroes of romance. A great man, says he, does not declaim in the tone of the theatre; his expressions in conversation are just and strong; he utters nothing low, or any thing pompous. Augustus Cæsar, represented to a barbarous audience, would command more respect, if seated on the Mogul's golden throne, sparkling with gems, than in the curule chair,

* Lettres sur l'Eloquence, &c.

to which power, not pomp, gave dignity. It is a degree of barbarism to ascribe nobleness of mind to arrogance of phrase, or insolence of manners. There is a certain expression of style and behaviour which verges towards barbarism; a state to which we may approach by roads that rise, as well as by those that fall. An European monarch would think it as unbecoming him to be styled *light of the world, glory of nations*, and by the swelling titles assumed by the Asiatic princes, as to be called *the tamer of horses*, or *the swift-footed*, like the heroes of Homer.

Père Brumoy seems to be very sensible of Corneille's misrepresentation of the Roman character, though he speaks of it in all the ambiguity of language which prudence could suggest, to one who was thwarting a national opinion *. He talks of *un raffinement de fierté* in the Romans, and asks, if they are of this globe, or spirits of a supe-

* Théâtre Grec: par Brumoy.

rior world? The Greeks of Racine, says he, are not indeed of that universe, which belonged only to Corneille: but with what pleasure does he make us behold ourselves in the persons he presents to us! and how agreeably would the heroes of antiquity be surprized to find themselves adorned by new manners, not indeed like their own, but which yet do not misbecome them!

It can hardly be supposed that a critic of Père Brumoy's taste did not mean to convey an oblique censure in these observations. The tragic poet is not to let his Pegasus, like the Hippogriffe of Astolpho, carry him to the moon; he is to represent men such as they were: and indeed, when the fable and manners do not agree, great improprieties and perfect incredibility ensue.

If a Grecian fable is chosen, Grecian manners should accompany it. A superficial decorum is kept up, if Agamemnon appears

pears a great chief; but he should be a Greek chief too, if he is to sacrifice his daughter to Diana. The same magnanimity of sentiment might certainly have been found in Gustavus Adolphus, and in other generals; but then how monstrous would appear the great catastrophe of the play!

If Shakspeare had not preserved the Roman character and sentiments, in his play of the Death of Julius Cæsar, we should have abhorred Brutus as an assassin, who by this artifice appears a tyrannicide: and had not Mr. Addison made Cato a patriot, according to the Roman mode, we should think he was mad for killing himself, because Cæsar was likely to become perpetual dictator.

It is difficult to sympathize with a man's passions, without adopting, for the time, his opinions, customs, and prejudices: but it is certainly necessary to exhibit the man as strongly tinctured with those prejudices and customs as possible.

To

To all but superficial critics, would it not appear as ridiculous to see Theseus and Achilles wear French manners, as a French dress? A little reflection would shew it is more so: for there are relations between sentiments and manners, and none between sentiments and dress.

It is strange that painters, who are to give the mute inanimate figure, are required to be rigid observers of the costumi, and that the dramatic poet, who is to imitate sentiment, discourse, and action, should be allowed to neglect them.

ON THE
HISTORICAL
D R A M A.

Nec minimum meruere decus, vestigia Græca.
Ausi deserere, et celebrare domestica facta.

And observe, at celebris domestica facta.
Nec minus interea decus, vestigia Circa

ON THE
HISTORICAL
D R A M A.

THOSE Dramas of Shakspeare, which he distinguishes by the name of his Histories, being of an original kind and peculiar construction, cannot come within any rules, prior to their existence. The office of the Critic, in regard to Poetry, is like that of the Grammarian and Rhetorician in respect to Language: it is the business of both to shew why such and such modes of speech, are proper and graceful, others improper and ungraceful: but they pronounce on such words and expressions only, as are actually extant.

The rules of Aristotle were drawn from
D the

34 ON THE HISTORICAL DRAMA.

the tragedies of Æschylus, Sophocles, &c. Had that great critic seen a play so fashioned on the chronicles of his country, thus representative of the manners of the times, and of the characters of the most illustrious persons concerned in a series of important events, perhaps he would have esteemed such a sort of drama well worth his attention, as very peculiarly adapted to those ends, which the Grecian philosophers proposed in popular entertainments. If it be the chief use of history, to teach philosophy by example, this species of history must be allowed to be the best preceptor. The catastrophe of these plays is not built on a vain and idle fable of the wrath of Juno, or of the revenge of slighted Bacchus; nor is a man represented entangled in the web of Fate, from which his Virtues and his Deities cannot extricate him: but here we are admonished to observe the effects of pride and ambition, the tyrant's dangers and the traitor's fate. The sentiments and the manners, the passions and their consequences, are
fully

fully set before you ; the force and lustre of poetical language join with the weight and authority of history, to impress the moral lesson on the heart. The poet collects, as it were, into a focus, those truths, which lie scattered in the diffuse volume of the historian, and kindles the flame of virtue, while he shews the miseries and calamities of vice.

The common interests of humanity make us attentive to every story that has an air of reality, but we are more affected if we know it to be true ; and the interest is still heightened if we have any relation to the persons concerned. Our noble countryman, Percy, engages us much more than Achilles, or any Grecian hero. The people, for whose use these public entertainments should be chiefly intended, know the battle of Shrewsbury to be a fact ; they are informed of what passed on the banks of the Severn : all that happened on the shore of the Scamander has, to them, the appearance of a fiction.

As the misfortunes of nations, like those of individuals, often arise from their peculiar dispositions, customs, prejudices, and vices, these home-born dramas are excellently calculated to correct them. The Grecian tragedies are so much founded on their mythology as to be very improper on our stage. The passion of Phædra and the death of Hippolytus, occasioned by the interposition of Venus and Neptune, wear the apparent marks of fiction: and when we cease to believe, we cease to be affected.

The nature of the Historical Play gave scope to the extensive talents of Shakspeare. He had an uncommon felicity in painting manners, and developing characters, which he could employ with peculiar grace and propriety, when he exhibited the chiefs in our civil wars. The great earl of Warwick, Cardinal Beaufort, Humphrey duke of Gloucester, the renowned Hotspur, were very interesting objects to their countrymen. Whatever shewed them in a strong light, and

and represented them with sentiments and manners agreeable to their historical characters, and to those things which common fame had divulged of them, must have engaged the attention of the spectator, and assisted in that delusion of his imagination, whence his sympathy with the story must arise. We are affected by the catastrophe of a stranger, we lament the destiny of an Œdipus, and the misfortunes of an Hecuba; but the little peculiarities of a character touch us only where we have some nearer affinity to the person, than the common relation of humanity: nor, unless we are particularly acquainted with the original character, can these distinguishing marks have the merit of heightening the resemblance, and animating the portrait.

We are apt to consider Shakspeare only as a poet; but he is certainly one of the greatest moral philosophers that ever lived.

Euripides

Euripides was highly esteemed by the ancients for the moral sentences, with which he has interspersed the speeches in his tragedies; and certainly many general truths are expressed in them with a sententious brevity. But he rather collects general opinions into maxims, and gives them a form which is easily retained by memory, than extracts any new observations from the characters in action; which every reader of penetration will find the invariable practice of our author: and when he introduces a general maxim, it seems drawn from him by the occasion. As it arises out of the action, it loses itself again in it, and remains not, as in other writers, an ambitious ornament glittering alone, but is so connected as to be an useful passage very naturally united with the story. The examples of this are so frequent, as to occur almost in every scene of his best plays. But lest I should be misunderstood, I will cite one from the second part of Henry IV, where the general maxim is, that

An habitation giddy and unsure
Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.

YORK.

Let us on ;

And publish the occasion of our arms.
The commonwealth is sick of their own choice :
Their over-greedy love hath surfeited.
An habitation giddy and unsure
Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.
Oh thou fond many ! with what loud applause,
Didst thou beat heav'n with blessing Bolingbroke,
Before he was, what thou would'st have him be !
And now, being trimm'd up in thine own desires,
Thou, beastly feeder, art so full of him,
That thou provok'st thyself to cast him up,
So, so, thou common dog, didst thou disgorge
Thy glutton bosom of the royal Richard,
And now thou would'st eat thy dead vomit up,
And howl'st to find it. What trust in these times ?
They that when Richard liv'd would have him die,
Are now become enamour'd on his grave :
Thou that throw'dst dust upon his goodly head,
When through proud London he came sighing on
After the admired heels of Bolingbroke,
Cry'st now, O earth, yield us that king again,
And take thou this.

Moral

Moral reflections may be more frequent in this kind of drama, than in the other species of tragedy, where, if not very short, they tease the spectator, whose mind is intent upon, and impatient for the catastrophe; and unless they arise necessarily out of the circumstances the person is in, they appear unnatural. For in the pressure of extreme distress, men are intent only on themselves and on the present exigence. The various interests and characters in these historical plays, and the mixture of the comic, weaken the operations of pity and terror, but introduce various opportunities of conveying moral instruction, as occasion is given to a variety of reflections and observations, more useful in common life than those drawn from the conditions of kings and heroes, and persons greatly superior to us by nature or fortune.

As there are poets of various talents, and readers of various tastes, one would rather wish that all the fields of Parnassus might
be

be free and open to men of genius, than that a proud and tyrannical spirit of criticism should controul us in the use of any of them. Those which we should have judged most barren, have brought forth noble productions, when cultivated by an able hand.

Even fairy land has produced the Sublime; and the wild regions of Romance have sometimes yielded just and genuine sentiments.

To write a perfect tragedy, a poet must be possessed of the Pathetic or the Sublime; or perhaps, to attain the utmost excellence, must, by a more uncommon felicity, be able to give the Sublime the finest touches of passion and tenderness, and to the Pathetic the dignity of the Sublime. The straining a moderate or feeble genius to these arduous tasks, has produced the most absurd bombast, and the most pitiable nonsense that has ever been uttered. Aristotle's rules, like Ulysses' bow,

bow, are held forth to all pretenders to Tragedy, who, as unfortunate as Penelope's suitors, only betray their weakness by an attempt superior to their strength, or ill adapted to their faculties. Why should not Poetry, in all her different forms, claim the same indulgence as her sister art? The nicest connoisseurs in Painting have applauded every master, who has justly copied nature. Had Michael Angelo's bold pencil been dedicated to drawing the Graces, or Rembrandt's to trace the soft bewitching smile of Venus, their works had probably proved very contemptible. Fashion does not so easily impose on our sense, as it misleads our judgment. Truth of design, and natural colouring, will always please the eye: we appeal not here to any set of rules; but in an imitative art we require only just imitation, with a certain freedom and energy, which is always necessary to form a complete resemblance to the pattern, which is borrowed from nature. I will own, the figures of gods and goddesses, graceful nymphs,

nymphs, and beautiful Cupids, are finer subjects for the pencil, than ordinary human forms ; yet if the painter imparts to these a resemblance to celebrated persons, throws them into their proper attitudes, and gives a faithful copy of the costume of the age and country, his work will create sensations of a different, but not less pleasing kind, than those excited by the admiration of exquisite beauty, and perfect excellence of workmanship. Perhaps he should rather be accounted a nice virtuoso than a consummate critic, who prefers the Poet or Sculptor's fairest idea to the various and extensive merits of the historic representation.

Nothing great is to be expected from any set of artists, who are to give only copies of copies. The treasures of nature are inexhaustible, as well in moral as in physical subjects. The talents of Shakespeare were universal, his penetrating mind saw through all characters ; and, as Mr. Pope says of him, he was not more a
master

master of our strongest emotions, than of our idlest sensations.

One cannot wonder, that, endued with so great and various powers, he broke down the barriers that had before confined the dramatic writers to the regions of Comedy, or Tragedy. He perceived the fertility of the subjects that lay between the two extremes; he saw, that in the historical play he could represent the manners of the whole people, give the general temper of the times, and bring in view the incidents that affected the common fate of his country. The Gothic muse had a rude spirit of liberty, and delighted in painting popular tumults, the progress of civil wars, and the revolutions of government, rather than a catastrophe within the walls of a palace. At the time he wrote, the wars of the Houses of York and Lancaster were fresh in men's minds. They had received the tale from some Nestor in their family, or neighbourhood, who had fought in the battle, he related.

related. Every spectator's affections were ranged under the white or red rose, in whose contentions some had lost their parents and friends, others had gained establishments and honours.

All the inducements which the Greek tragedians had to chuse their heroes from the works of the poets, who had sung the wars of Troy, and the Argonautic expedition, were still in greater force with our countryman to take his subjects from the history and traditions of those more recent transactions, in which the spectator was informed and interested more personally and locally. There was not a family so low, that had not had some of its branches torn off in the storms of these intestine commotions ; nor a valley so happily retired, that, at some time, *the foot of hostile paces had not bruis'd her flow'rets*. In these characters the rudest peasant read the sad history of his country : while the better sort were informed of the most minute circumstances by our chronicles. The tragedians

46 ON THE HISTORICAL DRAMA.

gedians who took their subjects from Homer, had all the advantage a painter would have, who was to draw a picture from a statue of Phidias or Praxiteles. Poor Shakspeare from the wooden images in our mean chronicles was to form his portraits. What judgment was there in discovering, that by moulding them to an exact resemblance he should engage and please ! And what discernment and penetration into characters, and what amazing skill in moral painting, to be able, from such uncouth models, to bring forth not only a perfect, but, when occasion required, a graceful likeness !

The patterns from which he drew, were not only void of poetical spirit and ornament, but also of all historical dignity. The histories of those times were a mere heap of rude undigested annals, coarse in their style, and crowded with trivial anecdotes. No Tacitus had investigated the obliquities of our statesmen, or, by diving
into

into the profound secrets of policy, had dragged into light the latent motives, the secret machinations of our politicians: yet how does he enter into the deepest mysteries of state! There cannot be a stronger proof of the superiority of his genius over the historians of the times than the following instance.

The learned Sir Thomas More, in his history of Crook'd-Back Richard, tells, with the garrulity of an old nurse, the current stories of this king's deformity, and the monstrous appearance of his infancy, which he seems with superstitious credulity to believe to have been the omens and prognostics of his future villainy. Shakspeare, with a more philosophic turn of mind, considers them, not as presaging, but as instigating his cruel ambition, and finely accounts in the following speeches for the asperity of his temper, and his fierce and unmitigated desire of dominion, from his being by his person disqualified

48 ON THE HISTORICAL DRAMA.

qualified for the softer engagements of society.

GLOUCESTER.

Well, say there is no kingdom then for Richard :
What other pleasure can the world afford ?
I'll make my heaven on a lady's lap ;
And deck my body in gay ornaments,
And 'witch sweet ladies with my words and looks.
Oh ! miserable thought ! and more unlikely,
Than to accomplish twenty golden crowns.
Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb,
And, for I should not deal in her soft laws,
She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe
To shrink my arm like to a wither'd shrub ;
To make an envious mountain on my back,
Where sits deformity to mock my body ;
To shape my legs of an uneven size ;
To disproportion me in every part :
Like to a Chaos, or unlick'd bear's whelp
That carries no impression like the dam.
And am I then a man to be belov'd ?
Oh monstrous fault to harbour such a thought !
Then since the world affords no joy to me,

But

But to command, to check, to o'er-bear such
As are of better person than myself;
I'll make my heav'n to dream upon the crown,
And while I live to account this world but hell,
Until the misshap'd trunk that bears this head
Be round impaled with a glorious crown.

[Henry VI. Act 3d, Scene 3d.

GLOUCESTER.

The midwife wonder'd, and the women cry'd,
Oh Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!
And so I was, which plainly signified
That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog:
Then since the heav'ns have shap'd my body so,
Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.
I have no brother, I am like no brother,
And that word, love, which grey-beards call divine,
Be resident in men like one another,
And not in me: I am myself alone.

[Henry VI. Act 5th, Scene 7th.

Our author, by following minutely the
chronicles of the times, has embarrassed
his dramas with too great a number of
persons and events. The hurley-burley of
these plays recommended them to a rude

E illiterate

illiterate audience, who, as he says, loved a noise of targets. His poverty, and the low condition of the stage (which at that time was not frequented by persons of rank), obliged him to this complaisance; and unfortunately he had not been tutored by any rules of art, or informed by acquaintance with just and regular dramas. Even the politer sort, by reading books of chivalry, which were the polite literature of the times, were accustomed to bold adventures and achievements. In our northern climates heroic adventures pleased more than the gallant dialogue, where love and honour dispute with all the sophistry of the schools, and one knows not when the contest would end, if heraldry did not step in and decide the point, as in the soliloquy of the Infanta in the Cid.

L'INFANTE.

T'écouterai-je encor, respect de ma naissance,

Qui fais un crime de mes feux ?

T'écouterai-je, amour, dont la douce puissance

Contre ce fier tyran fait rebeller mes vœux ?

Pauvre

Pauvre princesse, auquel des deux

Dois-tu prêter obéissance ?

Rodrigue, ta valeur te rend digne de moi ;

Mais pour être vaillant tu n'es pas fils de roi.

Le Cid, Acte 5me.

Nor is this rule, that a princess can love only the son of a king, a mere Spanish punto ; you shall hear two Spartan virgins, daughters of Lysander, speaking the same language :

ELPINICE.

Cotys est roi, ma sœur ; & comme sa couronne

Parle suffisamment pour lui,

Assuré de mon cœur que son trône lui donne,

De le trop demander il s'épargne l'ennui.

This lady then proceeds to question her sister concerning her inclination for her lover Spitridates, and urges in his favour ;

ELPINICE.

Car enfin, Spitridate a l'entretien charmant,

L'œil vif, l'esprit aisé, le cœur bon, l'ame belle ;

A tant de qualités s'il joignait un vrai zèle. . .

E 2

To

52 ON THE HISTORICAL DRAMA.

To which the other answers,

AGLATIDE.

Ma sœur, il n'est pas roi comme l'est votre amant.

Il n'est pas roi, vous dis-je, & c'est un grand défaut *.

The queen of the Lusitanians, in the famous play of Sertorius, speaks thus to that Roman general;

VIRITATE.

Car enfin pour remplir l'honneur de ma naissance,

Il me faudroit un roi de titre, et de puissance ;

Mais comme ill n'en est plus, je pense m'en devoir

Ou le pouvoir sans nom, ou le nom sans pouvoir.

And upon the effect of this prudent decision turns the great interest of the play. By the laws of romance the men are to be amorous, and the ladies ambitious. Poor Sertorius in his old age is in love with this lady, for whom Perpenna is also dying; and Sertorius, whom we had supposed sacrificed to the ambition of his lieutenant, is the victim of his jealousy.

* Agesilaus of Corneille.

Shakspeare

Shakspeare and Corneille are equally blameable for having complied with the bad taste of the age ; and by doing so, they have both brought unmerited censures on their country. The French impute barbarity and cruelty, to a people that could delight in bloody skirmishes on the stage. The English, as unjustly but as excusably, accuse of effeminacy and frivolousness, those who could sit to hear the following address of a lover to his mistress's bodkin, with which she had just put out one of his eyes :

PYMANTE.

O toi, qui secondant son courage inhumain,
Loin d'orner ses cheveux, dishonores sa main;
Exécration instrument de sa brutale rage,
Tu devais pour le moins respecter son image :
Ce portrait accompli d'un chef-d'œuvre des cieux ;
Imprimé dans mon cœur, exprimé dans mes yeux,
Quoique te commandât une ame si cruelle,
Devait être adoré de ta point rebelle.

Clitandre de Corneille.

The

The whole soliloquy includes seventy lines. I heartily wish, for the honour of both nations, the lover and his bodkin, and the soldiers and their halberds, had always been hissed off the stage. Our countryman was betrayed into his error, by want of judgment to discern what part of his story was not fit for representation. Corneille, for want of dramatic genius, was obliged to have recourse to points, conceits, cold and uninteresting declamations, to fill up his plays ; and these heavily drag along his undramatical dramas to a fifth act.

The ignorance of the times passed over the defects of each author ; and the bad taste then prevalent did more than endure, it even encouraged and approved, what should have been censured.

Mr. Voltaire has said, that the plots of Shakspeare's plays are as wild as that of the

the Clitandre just quoted ; and it must be allowed, they are often exceptionable : but at the same time we must observe, that though crowded too much, they are not so perplexed as to be unintelligible, which Corneille confesses his Clitandre might be to those who saw it but once. There is still another more essential difference perhaps, which is, that the wildest and most incorrect pieces of our Poet contain some incomparable speeches ; whereas the worst plays of Corneille have not a good stanza. The tragedy of King Lear is very far from being a regular piece ; yet there are speeches in it, which perhaps excel any thing that has been written by any tragedian, ancient or modern. However we will only compare one passage of it at present, with another in Clitandre ; as they both happen to be on similar subjects. The blinded lover, after many complaints, and wishes for revenge, hears the noise of a tempest, and thus breaks out :

PYMANTE.

PYMANTE.

Mes menaces déjà font trembler tout le monde :
 Le vent fuit d'épouvante, et le tonnére en gronde :
 L'œil du ciel s'en retire, et par un voile noir,
 N'y pouvant résister, se défend d'en rien voir.
 Cent nuages épais se distilant en larmes,
 A force de pitié, veulent m'ôter les armes.
 La nature étonnée embrasse mon couroux,
 Et veut m'offrir Dorise, ou devancer mes coups.
 Tout est de mon parti, le ciel même n'envoie
 Tant d'éclairs redoublés, qu'afin que je la voie.

King Lear, whom age renders weak and querulous, and who is now beginning to grow mad, thus very naturally, in the general calamity of the storm, recurs to his own particular circumstances.

LEAR.

Spit fire, spout rain ;
 Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters ;
 I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness,
 I never gave you kingdoms, call'd you children,
 You owe me no submission. Then let fall

Your

Your horrible pleasure : here I stand your slave,
 A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man !
 And yet I call you servile ministers,
 That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
 Your high engender'd battles, 'gainst a head
 So old and white as this. Oh ! oh ! 'tis foul.

They must have little feeling, that are
 not touched by this speech, so highly pa-
 thetic.

How fine is that which follows !

LEAR.

Let the great Gods,
 That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
 Find out their enemies now.] Tremble, thou wretch,
 That hast within thee undivulged crimes
 Unwhipt of justice ! Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
 Thou perjur'd, and thou simular of virtue,
 That art incestuous ! Caitiff, shake to pieces,
 That under covert, and convenient seeming,
 Hast practis'd on man's life ! Close pent up guilts,
 Rive your concealing continents, and ask
 These dreadful summoners grace !—I am a man
 More sinn'd against than sinning.

Thus

Thus it is that Shakspeare redeems the nonsense, the indecorums, the irregularities of his plays: and whoever, for want of natural taste, or from ignorance of the English language, is insensible to the merit of these passages, is just as unfit to judge of his works, as a deaf man, who only perceived the blackness of the sky, and did not hear the deep-voiced thunder, and the roaring elements, would have been to describe the awful horrors of this midnight storm.

The French critic apologizes for our persisting in the representation of Shakspeare's plays, by saying we have none of a more regular form. In this he is extremely mistaken; we have many plays written according to the rules of art; but nature, which speaks in Shakspeare, prevails over them all. If at one of our theatres there were a set of actors who gave the true force of every sentiment, seemed inspired with the passion they were to counterfeit, fell so naturally into the circumstances

cumstances and situations the poet had appointed for them, that they never betrayed they were actors, but might sometimes have an awkward gesture, or for a moment a vicious pronunciation, should we not constantly resort thither?—If at another theatre there were a set of puppets regularly featured, whose proportions and movements were geometrically true, and the faces, the action, the pronunciation of these puppets had no fault, but that there was no expression in their countenance, no natural air in their motion, and that their speech had not the various inflections of the human voice; would a real connoisseur abandon the living actors for such lifeless images, because some nice and dainty critic pleaded, that the puppets were not subject to any human infirmities, would not cough, sneeze, or become hoarse in the midst of a fine period? Or could it avail much to urge, that their movements and tones, being directed by just mechanics, would never betray the awkwardness

wardness of rusticity, or a false accent caught from bad education ?

The dramatis personæ of Shakspeare are men, frail by constitution, hurt by ill habits, faulty and unequal : but they speak with human voices, are actuated by human passions, and are engaged in the common affairs of human life. We are interested in what they do, or say, by feeling, every moment, that they are of the same nature as ourselves. Their precepts therefore are an instruction, their fates and fortunes an experience, their testimony an authority, and their misfortunes a warning.

Love and ambition are the subjects of the French plays. From the first of these passions, many by age and temper are entirely exempted ; and from the second, many more, by situation. Among a thousand spectators, there are not perhaps half a dozen, who ever were, or can be, in the circumstances of the persons represented :
they

they cannot sympathize with them, unless they have some conception of a tender passion, combated by ambition, or of ambition struggling with love. The fable of the French plays is often taken from history, but then a romantic passion is superadded to it, and to that both events and characters are rendered subservient.

Shakspeare, *in various nature wise*, does not confine himself to any particular passion. When he writes from history, he attributes to the persons such sentiments, as agreed with their actions and characters. There is not a more sure way of judging of the merit of rival geniuses, than by bringing them to the test of comparison where they have attempted subjects of a similar nature.

Corneille appears much inferior to our Shakspeare in the art of conducting the events, and displaying the characters, he borrows from the historian's page: his tragedy of Otho comprehends that period,
 3 in

in which the courtiers are caballing to make Galba adopt a successor agreeable to their interests. The court of that emperor is finely described by Tacitus, who, in a few words, sets before us the insolence, the profligacy, and rapaciousness of a set of ministers, encouraged by the weakness of the prince to attempt whatever they wished, and incited by his age to snatch by hasty rapine whatever they coveted.—

Tacitus, with his masterly pencil, has drawn the outlines of their characters so strongly, that a writer of any genius might finish up the portraits to great resemblance and perfection. We have surely a right to expect this from an author, who professes to have copied this great historian the most faithfully that was possible. One would imagine the insolent Martianus, the bold and subtle Vinius, the base, scandalous, slothful Laco, should all appear in their proper characters, which would be unfolding through the whole progress of the play, as their various schemes and interests were exposed. Instead of this,

Martianus

Martianus makes submissive love: Vinius and Laco are two ambitious courtiers, without any quality that distinguishes them from each other, or from any other intriguing statesman; nor do they at all contribute to bring about the revolution in the empire: their whole business seems to be match-making, and in that too they are so unskilful as not to succeed. They undertake it indeed, merely as it may influence the adoption. Several sentences from Tacitus are ingrafted into the dialogues, but, from a change of persons and circumstances, they lose much of their original force and beauty.

Galba addresses to his niece, who is in love with Otho, the fine speech which the historian supposes him to have made to Piso when he adopted him. The love-sick lady, tired of an harangue, the purport of which is unfavourable to her lover, and being besides no politician, answers the emperor, that she does not understand state affairs: a cruel reply to a speech he could have no motive

64 ON THE HISTORICAL DRAMA.

motive for making, but to display his wisdom and eloquence. The old warrior is more complaisant to her, for he enters into all the delicacies of her passion, as if he had studied *la carte du tendre**. To steal so much matter from Tacitus without imbibing one spark of his spirit; to translate whole speeches, yet preserve no likeness in the characters; is surely betraying a great deficiency of dramatic powers, and of the art of imitation. To represent the gay, luxurious, dissolute, ambitious Otho, the courtier of Nero, and the gallant of Poppea, as a mere Pastor Fido, who would die rather than be inconstant to his mistress, and is indifferent to empire but for her sake, is such a violation of historical truth, as is not to be endured. I pass over the absurd scene between the jealous ladies, the improbability of their treating the powerful and haughty favourites of the emperor with indignity, and Otho's thrice repeated attempt to kill himself be-

* Roman de Clelie.

fore his mistress's face, without the least reason why he should put an end to his life, or probability that she would suffer him to do it. To make minute criticisms, where the great parts are so defective, would be trifling.

Having observed how poorly Corneille has represented characters borrowed from so great a portrait-painter as Tacitus, let us now see what Shakspeare has done, from those awkward originals, our old chronicles.

ON THE HISTORICAL DRAMA. 63

For his mistress's love, without the least reason why he should put an end to his life, or probability that she would suffer him to do it. To make minute criticisms, where the great parts are so defective, would be trifling.

Having observed how poorly Corneille has represented characters borrowed from so great a portrait-painter as Racine, let us now see what Shakespeare has done, from those awkward originals, our old chieftains.

THE
FIRST PART
OF
HENRY IV.

F 2

THE
FIRST PART
OF
HENRY IV.

THE peculiar dexterity, with which the author unfolds the characters, and prepares the events of this play, deserves our attention.

There is not perhaps any thing more difficult in the whole compass of the dramatic art, than to open to the spectator the previous incidents, that were productive of the present circumstances, and the characters of the persons from whose conduct, in such circumstances, the subsequent events are to flow. An intelligent spectator will receive great pleasure from observing every
action

70 THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV.

action naturally arising out of the sentiments and manners of the persons represented. Happier is the poet, when the peculiar dispositions of his several characters do naturally unfold the perplexities of the fable, than he who uses the liberty, which Horace allows, to call a Deity to his assistance. This play opens by the king's declaring his intention to undertake the crusade, as soon as peace will allow him to do it. Westmorland informs him of the defeat of Mortimer by Owen Glendower; the king relates the news of Percy's victory at Holmedon, which naturally leads him to the praise of this young hero, and to express his envy of lord Northumberland's happiness,

To be the father of so blest a son,

While I (says he)

See riot and dishonour stain the brow

Of my young Harry:

then he mentions Percy's refusal of his prisoners, which Westmorland attributes to the malevolent suggestions of Worcester. Thus
at

at once is presented to the spectator, the condition of the state, the temper of the times, and the characters of the persons from whom the catastrophe is to arise.

The stern authority the king assumes on Hotspur's disobedience to his commands, could not fail to inflame a warm young hero, flushed with recent victory, and elate with the consciousness of having so well defended a crown, which his father and uncle had in a manner conferred. Nothing can be more natural than that, in such a temper, he should recur to the obligations the king had to his family: and thus while he appears to vent his spleen, he explains to the spectator what is past, and opens the source of the future rebellion; and by connecting former transactions with the present passions and events, creates in the reader an interest and a sympathy, which a cold narration or a pompous declamation could not have effected. As the author designed Percy should be an interesting character, his disobedience to the king, in regard to the prisoners, is mitigated

72 THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV.

tigated by his pleading the unfitness of the person and unfavourableness of the occasion to urge him on the subject. To this effeminate courtier (says he)

I then, all smarting with my wounds being cold,
Out of my grief and my impatience
To be so pester'd with a popinjay,
Answer'd neglectingly—I know not what.

Thus has the poet artfully taken from the rebel the hateful crimes of premeditated revolt and deep-laid treachery. He is hurried by an impetuosity of soul out of the sphere of obedience, and, like a comet, though dangerous to the general system, is still an object of admiration and wonder to every beholder. It is marvellous, that Shakspeare, from bare chronicles, coarse history, and traditional tales, could thus extract the wisdom and caution of the politician Henry, and catch the fire of the martial spirit of Hotspur. The wrath of Achilles in Homer is not sustained with more dignity. Each hero is offended that the prize of valour,

Due

THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV. 73

Due to many a well-fought day,
is rudely snatched from him by the hand of
power.—One should suspect an author of
more learning to have had the character of
Achilles in his eye, and also the advice
of Horace as to the manner of representing
him on the stage:

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer;
Jura neget sibi nata, nihil non arroget armis.

His misdemeanours rise so naturally out
of his temper, and that temper is so noble,
that we are almost as much interested for
him as for a more virtuous character.

His trespass may be well forgot
It hath th' excuse of youth and heat of blood,
And an adopted name of privilege,
A hair-brain'd Hotspur govern'd by a spleen.

The great aspiring soul of Hotspur bears
out rebellion · it seems, in him, to flow
from

74 THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV.

from an uncontrollable energy of soul, born to give laws, too potent to receive them. In every scene he appears with the same animation ; he is always that Percy,

Whose spirit lent a fire
Even to the dullest peasant in the camp,
Led ancient lords and rev'rend bishops on
To bloody battles, and to bruising arms.

He has also the frankness of Achilles, and the same abhorrence of falsehood ; he is as impatient of Glendower's pretensions to supernatural powers, as to the king's assuming a right over his prisoners. In dividing the kingdom, he will not yield a foot of ground to those who dispute with him ; but would give any thing to a well-deserving friend. It is a pardonable violation of historical truth, to give the Prince of Wales, who behaved very gallantly at the battle of Shrewsbury, the honour of conquering him ; and it is more agreeable to the spectator, as the event was, to beat down

The

The never-daunted Percy to the earth,

to suppose it did not happen from the arrow of a peasant, but from the sword of Henry Monmouth, whose spirit came with a higher commission from the same fiery sphere.

In Worcester, the rebel appears in all his odious colours ; proud, envious, malignant, artful, he is finely contrasted by the noble Percy. Shakspeare, with the sagacity of a Tacitus, observes the jealousies which must naturally arise between a family, who have conferred a crown, and the king who has received it, who will always think the presence of such benefactors *too bold and peremptory*.

The character of Henry IV. is perfectly agreeable to that given him by historians. The play opens by his declaring his intention to war against the infidels, which he does not undertake, as was usual in those times, from a religious enthusiasm, but is induced

76 THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV.

induced to it by political motives : that the martial spirit may not break out at home in civil wars ; nor peace and idleness give men opportunity to enquire into his title to the crown, and too much discuss a point which would not bear a cool and close examination. Henry had the specious talents, which assist a man under certain circumstances to usurp a kingdom : but either from the want of those great and solid qualities, which are necessary to maintain opinion loyal to the throne to which it had raised him, or from the impossibility of satisfying the expectations of those who had assisted his usurpation, as some of the best historians with great appearance of reason have suggested*, it is certain his reign was full of discontents and troubles.

The popular arts by which he captivated the multitude, are finely described in the speech he makes to his son, in the third act. Any other poet would have thought he had

* Hume's Hist. of Hen. IV.

acquitted

THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV. 77

acquitted himself well enough in that dialogue, by a general fatherly admonition delivered with the dignity becoming a monarch ; but Shakspeare rarely deals in common-place, and general morals. The peculiar temper and circumstances of the person, and the exigency of the time, influence the speaker, as in real life. It is not only the king and parent, but Henry Plantagenet, that chides the prince of Wales. How natural it is for him, on Percy's revolt, to recur to his own rebellion against Richard, and to apprehend, that the same levities which lost that king, first the opinion, then the allegiance of his subjects, should deprive the prince of his succession ! Nothing can be better imagined than the parallel he draws between himself and Percy, Richard and Henry of Monmouth. The affectionate father, the offended king, the provident politician, and the conscious usurper, are all united in the following speeches :

K. HENRY.

78 THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV.

K. HENRY.

I know not whether God will have it so,
For some displeasing service I have done ;
That, in his secret doom, out of my blood
He'll breed revengement, and a scourge for me.
But thou dost in thy passages of life
Make me believe that thou art only mark'd
For the hot vengeance and the rod of heav'n,
To punish my mis-treadings. Tell me, else
Could such inordinate and low desires,
Such poor, such base, such lewd, such mean attempts,
Such barren pleasures, rude society
As thou art match'd withal, and grafted to,
Accompany the greatness of thy blood,
And hold their level with thy princely heart ?

K. HENRY.

Heav'n pardon thee. You let me wonder, Harry,
At thy affections, which do hold a wing
Quite from the flight of all thy ancestors.
Thy place in council thou hast rudely lost,
Which by thy younger brother is supply'd ;
And art almost an alien to the hearts
Of all the court and princes of my blood.

The

THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV. 79

The hope and expectation of thy time
Is ruin'd, and the soul of every man
Prophetically does fore-think thy fall.
Had I so lavish of my presence been,
So common-hackney'd in the eyes of men,
So stale and cheap to vulgar company ;
Opinion, that did help me to the crown,
Had still kept loyal to possession,
And left me in reputeless banishment,
A fellow of no mark, nor likelihood :
But being seldom seen, I could not stir,
But like a comet, I was wonder'd at,
That men would tell their children, this is he ;
Others would say, where ? which is Bolingbroke ?
And then I stole all courtesy from heav'n,
And drest myself in much humility,
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crowned king.
Thus I did keep my person fresh and new,
My presence like a robe pontifical,
Ne'er seen, but wonder'd at ; and so my state,
Seldom, but sumptuous, shew'd like a feast,
And won, by rareness, such solemnity.
The skipping king, he ambled up and down

With

80 THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV.

With shallow jesters, and rash bavin wits,
 Soon kindled, and soon burnt ; 'scarded his state,
 Mingled his royalty with carping fools ;
 Had his great name profaned with their scorns ;
 And gave his countenance, against his name,
 To laugh at gybing boys, and stand the push
 Of every beardless, vain comparative ;
 Grew a companion to the common streets,
 Enfeoffed himself to popularity.
 That, being daily swallow'd by men's eyes,
 They surfeited with honey, and began
 To loath a taste of sweetness ; whereof a little
 More than a little, is by much too much.
 So when he had occasion to be seen,
 He was but as the cuckow is in June,
 Heard, nor regarded ; seen but with such eyes,
 As, sick and blunted with community,
 Afford no extraordinary gaze ;
 Such, as is bent on sun-like majesty,
 When it shines seldom in admiring eyes :
 But rather drowz'd, and hung their eye-lids down,
 Slept in his face, and render'd such aspect
 As cloudy men use to their adversaries,
 Being with his presence glutted, gorg'd and full.
 And in that very line, Harry, stand'st thou ;

For

THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV. 81

For thou hast lost thy princely privilege
With vile participation ; not an eye,
But is a-weary of thy common sight,
Save mine, which hath desir'd to see thee more :
Which now doth, what I would not have it do,
Make blind itself with foolish tenderness.

Our author is so little under the discipline of art, that we are apt to ascribe his happiest successes, as well as his most unfortunate failings, to chance. But I cannot help thinking, there is more of contrivance and care in his execution of this play, than in almost any he has written. It is a more regular drama than his other historical plays, less charged with absurdities, and less involved in confusion. It is indeed liable to those objections, which are made to Tragi-comedy. But if the pedantry of learning could ever recede from its dogmatical rules, I think that this play, instead of being condemned for being of that species, would obtain favour for the species itself, though perhaps correct taste may be offended with the transitions

G

from

from grave and important, to light and ludicrous subjects: and more still with those from great and illustrious, to low and mean persons. Foreigners, unused to these compositions, will be much disgusted at them. The vulgar call all animals that are not natives of their own country, monsters, however beautiful they may be in their form, or wisely adapted to their climate, and natural destination. The prejudices of pride are as violent and unreasonable, as the superstitions of ignorance. On the French Parnassus, a tragi-comedy of this kind will be deemed a monster fitter to be shewn to the people at a fair, than exhibited to circles of the learned and polite. From some peculiar circumstances relating to the characters in this piece, we may, perhaps, find a sort of apology for the motley mixture thrown into it. We cannot but suppose, that at the time it was written, many stories yet subsisted of the wild adventures of this Prince of Wales, and his idle companions. His subsequent reformation, and his conquests in France, rendered him
a very

a very popular character. It was a delicate affair to expose the follies of Henry V. before a people proud of his victories, and tender of his fame, at the same time so informed of the extravagancies, and excesses of his youth, that he could not appear divested of them with any degree of historical probability. Their enormity would have been greatly heightened, if they had appeared in a piece entirely serious, and full of dignity and decorum. How happily therefore was the character of Falstaffe introduced, whose wit and festivity in some measure excuse the Prince for admitting him into his familiarity, and suffering himself to be led by him into some irregularities. There is hardly a young hero, full of gaiety and spirit, who, if he had once fallen into the society of so pleasant a companion, could have the severity to discard him, or would not say, as the Prince does,

He could better spare a better man.

How skilfully does our author follow the tradition of the Prince's having been engaged

in a robbery, yet make his part in it a mere frolic to play on the cowardly and braggart temper of Falstaffe ! The whole conduct of that incident is very artful: he rejects the proposal of the robbery, and only complies with the playing a trick on the robbers ; and care is taken to inform you, that the money is returned to its owners.—

There is great propriety likewise in the behaviour of Prince Henry, when he supposes Falstaffe to lie dead before him : to have expressed no concern, would have appeared unfeeling ; to have lamented such a companion too seriously, ungraceful : with a suitable mixture of tenderness and contempt he thus addresses the body :

What ! old acquaintance ! could not all this flesh

Keep in a little life ? Poor Jack ! farewell !

I could have better spar'd a better man.

The Prince seems always diverted, rather than seduced by Falstaffe ; he despises his vices while he is entertained by his humour ; and though Falstaffe is for a while a stain

stain upon his character, yet it is of a kind with those colours, which are used for a disguise in sport, being of such a nature as are easily washed out, without leaving any bad tincture. And we see Henry, as soon as he is called to the high and serious duties of a king, come forth at once with unblemished majesty. The disposition of the hero is made to pierce through the idle frolics of the boy, throughout the whole piece ; for his reformation is not effected in the last scene of the last act, as is usual in our comedies, but is prepared from the very beginning of the play. The scene between the Prince and Francis, is low and ridiculous, and seems one of the greatest indecorums of the piece ; at the same time the attentive spectator will find the purpose of it is to shew him, that Henry was studying human nature, in all her variety of tempers and faculties. I am now, says he, acquainted with all humours, (meaning dispositions) since the days of good man Adam to the present hour. In the play of Henry V. you are told, that in his youth he had
been

86 THE FIRST PART OF HENRY IV.

been sedulously observing mankind ; and from an apprehension, perhaps, how difficult it was to acquire an intimate knowledge of men, whilst he kept up the forms his rank prescribed, he waved the ceremonies and decorums of his situation, and familiarly conversed with all orders of society. The jealousy his father had conceived of him would probably have been increased, if he had affected such a sort of popularity as would have gained the esteem as well as love of the multitude.

Whether Henry, in the early part of his life, was indulging a humour that inclined him to low and wild company, or endeavouring to acquire a deeper and more extensive knowledge of human nature, by a general acquaintance with mankind, is the business of his historians to determine. But a critic must surely applaud the dexterity of Shakspeare for throwing this colour over that part of his conduct ; whether he seized on some intimations historians had given of that sort, or, of himself, imagined so respectable

table a motive for the Prince's deviations from the dignity of his birth. This piece must have delighted the people at the time it was written, as the follies of their favourite character were so managed, that they rather seemed foils to set off its virtues, than stains which obscured them.

Whether we consider the character of Falstaffe as adapted to encourage and excuse the extravagances of the Prince, or by itself, we must certainly admire it, and own it to be perfectly original.

The professed wit, either in life or on the stage, is usually severe and satirical. But mirth is the source of Falstaffe's wit. He seems rather to invite you to partake of his merriment, than to attend to his jest: a man must be ill-natured, as well as dull, who does not join in the mirth of this jovial companion, the best calculated, in all respects, to raise laughter of any that ever appeared on a stage.

He

He joins the finesse of wit to the drol-
 lery of humour. Humour is a kind of
 grotesque wit, shaped and coloured by the
 disposition of the person in whom it resides,
 or by the subject to which it is applied. It
 is oftenest found in odd and irregular minds:
 but this peculiar turn distorts wit, and
 though it gives it a burlesque air, which
 excites momentary mirth, renders it less
 just, and consequently less agreeable to
 our judgments. Gluttony, corpulency, and
 cowardice, are the peculiarities of Falstaffe's
 composition: they render him ridiculous
 without folly, throw an air of jest and festi-
 vity about him, and make his manners suit
 with his sentiments, without giving to his
 understanding any particular bias. As the
 contempt attendant on these vices and de-
 fects is the best antidote against any infec-
 tion that might be caught in his society; so
 it was very skilful to make him as ridi-
 culous as witty, and as contemptible as en-
 tertaining. The admirable speech upon
 honour would have been both indecent and
 dangerous

dangerous from any other person. We must allow his wit is every where just, his humour genuine, his character perfectly original, and sustained through every scene, in every play, in which it appears.

As Falstaffe, whom the author certainly intended to be perfectly witty, is less addicted to quibble and play on words, than any of his comic characters, I think we may fairly conclude, our author was sensible that it was but a false kind of wit, which he practised from the hard necessity of the times: for in that age, the professor quibbled in his chair, the judge quibbled on the bench, the prelate quibbled in the pulpit, the statesman quibbled at the council-board; nay, even majesty quibbled on the throne.

He joins the finesse of wit to the drolery of humour. Humour is a kind of grotesque wit, shaped and coloured by the disposition of the person in whom it resides, or by the subject to which it is applied. It is oftenest found in odd and irregular minds: but this peculiar turn distorts wit, and though it gives it a burlesque air, which excites momentary mirth, renders it less just, and consequently less agreeable to our judgments. Gluttony, corpulency, and cowardice, are the peculiarities of Falstaffe's composition: they render him ridiculous without folly, throw an air of jest and festivity about him, and make his manners suit with his sentiments, without giving to his understanding any particular bias. As the contempt attendant on these vices and defects is the best antidote against any infection that might be caught in his society; so it was very skilful to make him as ridiculous as witty, and as contemptible as entertaining. The admirable speech upon honour would have been both indecent and dangerous

dangerous from any other person. We must allow his wit is every where just, his humour genuine, his character perfectly original, and sustained through every scene, in every play, in which it appears.

As Falstaffe, whom the author certainly intended to be perfectly witty, is less addicted to quibble and play on words, than any of his comic characters, I think we may fairly conclude, our author was sensible that it was but a false kind of wit, which he practised from the hard necessity of the times: for in that age, the professor quibbled in his chair, the judge quibbled on the bench, the prelate quibbled in the pulpit, the statesman quibbled at the council-board; nay, even majesty quibbled on the throne.

dangerous from any other person. We must allow his wit is every where just, his humour genuine, his character perfectly original, and sustained through every scene, in every play, in which it appears.

As Falstaff, whom the author certainly intended to be perfectly witty, is less ad-
dicted to quibble and play on words, than any of his comic characters, I think we may fairly conclude, our author was sen-
sible that it was but a false kind of wit, which he prised from the hard necessity of the times: for in that age, the pro-
sor quibbled in his chair, the judge quib-
bled on the bench, the prelate quibbled in
the pulpit, the statesman quibbled at the
council-board; nay, even majesty quibbled
on the throne.

THE
SECOND PART
OF
HENRY IV.

SECOND PART

OF

HENRY IV.

THE
SECOND PART
OF
HENRY IV.

IT is uncommon to find the same spirit and interest diffused through the sequel, as in the first part of a play: but the fertile and happy mind of Shakspeare could create or diversify at pleasure; could produce new characters, or vary the attitudes of those before exhibited, according to the occasion. He leaves us in doubt, whether most to admire the fecundity of his imagination in the variety of its productions; or the strength and steadiness of his genius in sustaining the spirit, and preserving unimpaired, through various circumstances and situations, what his invention had originally produced.

We

94 THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

We shall hardly find any man to-day more like to what he was yesterday, than the persons here are like to what they were in the First Part of Henry IV. This is the more astonishing as the author has not confined himself like all other dramatic writers to a certain theatrical character; which, formed entirely of one passion, presents to us always the patriot, the lover, or the conqueror. These, still turning on the same hinge, describe, like a piece of clock-work, a regular circle of movements. In human nature, of which Shakspeare's characters are a just imitation, every passion is controlled and forced into many deviations by various incidental dispositions and humours. The operations of this complicated machine are far more difficult to trace, than the steady undeviating line of the artificial character formed on one simple principle. Our poet seems to have as great an advantage over ordinary dramatic poets, as Dædalus had above his predecessors in sculpture. They could make a representation of the limbs
and

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV. 95

and features which compose the human form. He first had the skill to give it gesture, attitude, the easy graces of real life, and to exhibit its powers in a variety of exertions.

We shall again see Northumberland timid and wavering, forward in conspiracy, yet hesitating to join in an action of doubtful issue.

King Henry is as prudent a politician on his death-bed, as at council ; his eye, just before it closed for ever, stretching itself beyond the hour of death, to the view of those dangers, which from the temper of the Prince of Wales, and the condition of the times, threatened his throne and family. I cannot help taking notice of the remarkable attention of the poet, to the cautious and politic temper of Henry, when he makes him, even in speaking to his friends and partisans, dissemble so far, in relating Richard's prophecy, that Northumberland,
who

96 THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

who helped him to the throne, would one day revolt from him, as to add,

Though then, Heaven knows, I had no such intent ;

But that necessity so bow'd the state,

That I and Greatness were compell'd to kiss.

To his successor he expresses himself very differently, when he says,

Heaven knows, my son,

By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways

I met this crown.

These delicacies of conduct lie hardly within the poet's province, but have their source in that great and universal capacity, which the attentive reader will find to belong to our author, beyond any other writer. He alone, perhaps, would have perceived the decorum and fitness of making so wise a man reserved even with his friends, and trust a confession of the iniquities, by which he obtained

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV. 97

obtained the crown, only to his successor, whose interest it was not to disgrace whatever could authorize his attainment of it. Let tragedy-writers who make princes prate with pages and waiting-women of their murders and treasons, learn for once, from rude and illiterate Shakspeare, how averse pride is coolly to confess, and prudence to betray, what the fever and deliriums of ambition have prompted us to do.

Falstaffe appears with his former dispositions, but in new situations: and entertains us in a variety of scenes.

Hotspur is as it were revived to the spectator, in the following character given of him by his lady, when she dissuades Northumberland from joining the forces of the Archbishop.

Lady PERCY.

Oh, yet for heav'n's sake, go not to these wars.

The time was, father, that you broke your word,

When you were more endear'd to it than now ;

When your own Percy, when my heart-dear Harry,

H

Threw



98 THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

Threw many a northward look, to see his father
 Bring up his pow'rs; but he did long in vain!
 Who then persuaded you to stay at home?
 There were two honours lost; yours and your son's:
 For yours, may heavenly glory brighten it!
 For his, it struck upon him as the sun
 In the grey vault of heav'n; and by his light
 Did all the chivalry of England move
 To do brave acts. He was indeed the glass,
 Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves.
 He had no legs, that practis'd not his gait;
 And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish,
 Became the accents of the valiant;
 For those, that could speak low and tardily,
 Would turn their own perfection to abuse,
 To seem like him: so that in speech, in gait,
 In diet, in affections of delight,
 In military rules, humours of blood,
 He was the mark and glass, copy and book,
 That fashion'd others. And him, wond'rous him!
 O miracle of men! him did you leave
 To look upon the hideous god of war
 In disadvantage; to abide a field
 Where nothing but the sound of Hotspur's name
 Did seem defensible. So you left him.

Never,

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV. 99

Never, O, never do his ghost the wrong,
To hold your honour more precise and nice
With others, than with him. Let them alone:
The marshal and the archbishop are strong ;
Had my sweet Harry had but half their numbers,
To-day might I (hanging on Hotspur's neck)
Have talk'd of Monmouth's grave.

Justice Shallow is an admirably well-drawn comic character, but he never appears better, than by reflection in the mirror of Falstaffe's wit, in whose descriptions he is most strongly exhibited.—It is said by some, that the Justice was meant for a particular gentleman, who had prosecuted the author for deer-stealing. I know not whether that story be well grounded. The Shallows are to be found every where, in every age ; but they who have least character of their own, are most formed and modified by the fashion of the times, and by their peculiar profession or calling. So, though we often meet with a resemblance to this Justice, we shall never find an exact parallel to him, now when manners are so much changed.—History or

98 THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

Threw many a northward look, to see his father
 Bring up his pow'rs; but he did long in vain!
 Who then persuaded you to stay at home?
 There were two honours lost; yours and your son's:
 For yours, may heavenly glory brighten it!
 For his, it struck upon him as the sun
 In the grey vault of heav'n; and by his light
 Did all the chivalry of England move
 To do brave acts. He was indeed the glass,
 Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves.
 He had no legs, that practis'd not his gait;
 And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish,
 Became the accents of the valiant;
 For those, that could speak low and tardily,
 Would turn their own perfection to abuse,
 To seem like him: so that in speech, in gait,
 In diet, in affections of delight,
 In military rules, humours of blood,
 He was the mark and glass, copy and book,
 That fashion'd others. And him, wond'rous him!
 O miracle of men! him did you leave
 To look upon the hideous god of war
 In disadvantage; to abide a field
 Where nothing but the sound of Hotspur's name
 Did seem defensible. So you left him.

Never,

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV. 99

Never, O, never do his ghost the wrong,
To hold your honour more precise and nice
With others, than with him. Let them alone:
The marshal and the archbishop are strong ;
Had my sweet Harry had but half their numbers,
To-day might I (hanging on Hotspur's neck)
Have talk'd of Monmouth's grave.

Justice Shallow is an admirably well-drawn comic character, but he never appears better, than by reflection in the mirror of Falstaffe's wit, in whose descriptions he is most strongly exhibited.—It is said by some, that the Justice was meant for a particular gentleman, who had prosecuted the author for deer-stealing. I know not whether that story be well grounded. The Shallows are to be found every where, in every age ; but they who have least character of their own, are most formed and modified by the fashion of the times, and by their peculiar profession or calling. So, though we often meet with a resemblance to this Justice, we shall never find an exact parallel to him, now when manners are so much changed.—History or

100 THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

Philosophy cannot better set forth the superior danger of a rebellion sanctified by the Church, than by the following words of Morton.

MORTON.

The gentle Archbishop of York is up
With well appointed powers. He is a man,
Who with a double surety binds his followers.
My lord, your son had only but the corps,
But shadows, and the shews of men to fight:
For that same word, rebellion, did divide
The action of their bodies from their souls,
And they did fight with queasiness, constrain'd,
As men drink potions, that their weapons only
Seem'd on our side, but for their spirits and souls,
This word, rebellion, it had froze them up.

But now, the bishop
Turns insurrection to religion:
Suppos'd sincere and holy in his thoughts,
He's follow'd both with body and with mind,
And doth enlarge his rising with the blood
Of fair king Richard, scrap'd from Pomfret stones;
Derives from Heaven his quarrel and his cause;
Tells them he doth bestride a bleeding land
Gasping for life under great Bolingbroke:
And more, and less, do flock to follow him.

Nor

Nor can the indecency of a prelate's appearing in arms, and the abuse of an authority derived from the sacred function, be more strongly arraigned, than in the speeches of Westmorland, and John of Lancaster.

WESTMORLAND.

Then, my lord,
 Unto your grace do I in chief address
 The substance of my speech. If that rebellion
 Came like itself, in base and abject routs,
 Led on by bloody youth, goaded with rage,
 And countenanc'd by boys and beggary ;
 I say, if damn'd commotion so appear'd
 In his true, native, and most proper shape,
 You, reverend father, and these noble lords,
 Had not been here to dress the ugly form
 Of base and bloody insurrection,
 With your fair honours. You, my lord archbishop,
 Whose see is by a civil peace maintain'd,
 Whose beard the silver hand of peace hath touch'd,
 Whose learning and good letters peace hath tutor'd,
 Whose white investments figure innocence,
 The dove and very blessed spirit of peace ;

Wherefore

102 THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

Wherefore do you so ill translate yourself
Out of the speech of peace, that bears such grace,
Into the harsh and boist'rous tongue of war ?

LANCASTER.

My lord of York, it better shew'd with you,
When that your flock, assembled by the bell,
Encircled you to hear with reverence
Your exposition on the holy text ;
Than now to see you here an iron man,
Cheering a rout of rebels with your drum,
Turning the word to sword, and life to death.
That man that sits within a monarch's heart,
And ripens in the sun-shine of his favour,
Would he abuse the count'nance of the king,
Alack, what mischiefs might be set abroad,
In shadow of such greatness ! With you, lord bishop,
It is ev'n so. Who hath not heard it spoken,
How deep you were within the books of Heav'n
To us, the speaker in his parliament,
To us, th' imagin'd voice of Heav'n itself,
The very opener and intelligencer
Between the grace, the sanctities of Heav'n,
And our dull workings : O, who shall believe
But you misuse the rev'rence of your place,
Employ the countenance and grace of Heav'n,

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV. 103

As a false favourite doth his prince's name,
In deeds dishonourable ? You've taken up,
Under the counterfeited zeal of God,
The subjects of his substitute, my father ;
And both against the peace of Heav'n and him,
Have here up-swarm'd them.

The Archbishop of York, even when he appears an iron man, keeps up the gravity and seeming sanctity of his character, and wears the mitre over his helmet. He is not, like Hotspur, a valiant rebel, full of noble anger and fierce defiance : he speaks like a cool politician to his friends, and like a deep designing hypocrite to his enemies, and pretends he is only acting as physician to the state.

I have before observed, that Shakspeare had the talents of an orator, as much as of a poet ; and I believe it will be allowed, that the speeches of Westmorland and Lancaster are as proper on this occasion, and the particular circumstances as happily touched, as they could have been by the most judicious orator.

orator. I know not that any poet, ancient or modern, has shewn so perfect a judgment in rhetoric as our countryman. I wish he had employed his eloquence likewise, in arraigning the baseness and treachery of John of Lancaster's conduct, in breaking his covenant with the rebels.

Pistol is an odd kind of personage, intended probably to ridicule some fashionable affectation of bombast language. When such characters exist no longer but in the writings, where they have been ridiculed, they seem to have been monsters of the poet's brain. The originals lost and the mode forgotten, one can neither praise the imitation, nor laugh at the ridicule. Comic writers should therefore always exhibit some characteristic distinctions, as well as temporary modes. Justice Shallow will for ever rank with a certain species of men; he is like a well-painted portrait in the dress of his age. Pistol appears a mere antiquated habit, so uncouthly fashioned, we can hardly believe, it was made for any thing but a
masquerade

masquerade frolic. Poets who mean to please posterity, should therefore work as painters, not as tailors, and give us peculiar features, rather than fantastic habits: but where there is such a prodigious variety of well-drawn portraits as in this play, we may excuse one piece of mere drapery, especially when exhibited to expose an absurd and troublesome fashion.

Mine hostess Quickly is of a species not extinct. It may be said, the author there sinks from comedy to farce; but she helps to complete the character of Falstaffe, and some of the dialogues in which she is engaged are diverting. Every scene in which Doll Tearsheet appears, is indecent, and therefore not only indefensible but excusable. There are delicacies of decorum in one age unknown to another age; but whatever is immoral, is equally blameable in all ages, and every approach to obscenity is an offence for which wit cannot atone, nor the barbarity or the corruption of the times excuse.

Having

Having considered the characters of this piece, I cannot pass over the conduct of it without taking notice of the peculiar felicity, with which the fable unfolds itself from the very beginning.

The first scenes give the outlines of the characters, and the argument of the drama. Where is there an instance of any opening of a play equal to this? And I think I did not rashly assert, that it is one of the most difficult parts of the dramatic art: for that surely may be allowed so, in which the greatest masters have very seldom succeeded. Euripides is not very happy in this respect. Iphigenia in Tauris begins by telling, to herself, in a pretty long soliloquy, who she is, and all that happened to her at Aulis. As Aristotle gives this play the highest praise, we may be assured it did not in any respect offend the Greek taste: and Boileau not injudiciously prefers this simple exposition, destitute as it is of any grace, to the perplexed

plexed and tedious declamation of the modern stage.

Que dès les premiers vers l'action préparée,
 Sans peine, du sujet applanisse l'entrée,
 Je me ris d'un acteur, qui lent à s'exprimer,
 De ce qu'il veut, d'abord ne fait pas m'informer ;
 Et qui, debrouillant mal une pénible intrigue,
 D'un divertissement me fait une fatigue.
 J'aimerois mieux encor qu'il déclînât son nom,
 Et dît, Je suis Oreste, ou bien Agamemnon :
 Que d'aller par un tas de confuses merveilles,
 Sans rien dire à l'esprit, étourdir les oreilles.

That the simplicity of Euripides is preferable to the perplexity or bombast of Corneille's manner in developing the story of several of his tragedies, no person of just taste, I believe, will dispute. The first scene of the *Cinna* has been ridiculed by Boileau. That of *Sertorius* is not very happy. His famous play of *Rodogune* is opened by two unknown persons, one of whom begins,

Enfin ce jour pompeux, cet heureux jour, nous luit ;

and,

and, after *un tas de confuses merveilles* in the most wretched verse, extended to the length of seventy lines, when the reader very impatiently expects to be informed of the whole of the narration, stops short with these words ;

Je vous acheverai le reste une autre fois.

Two brothers united by the most tender friendship, living in the same palace, having been long in love with the same princess, have never yet intimated their passion to each other, not from motives of jealousy or distrust, but that their confidants may tell it the spectator, and make him some amends for the abrupt conclusion of the former conversation. However, still the poor spectator is much in the dark, till the queen, who is a perfect Machiavel, relates, merely from the love of talking, all the murders she has committed, and those she still intends to commit, to her waiting-women, for whose parts she expresses at the same time a sovereign contempt.

Here

Here I cannot help taking notice, that as the poet's want of art made it necessary to set the queen to prate of her former crimes, to let us into the fable; his ignorance of human nature betrayed him, in a succeeding scene, into the enormous absurdity of making both Rodogune and the queen, without hesitation, the one advise the lover to murder his mistress, the other the son to murder his mother. Here again an instance offers itself of our Shakspeare's superior knowledge of the heart of man. King John wishes to instigate Hubert to kill prince Arthur: but observe with what difficulty he expresses his horrid purpose.—

King JOHN.

Come hither, Hubert. O my gentle Hubert,
We owe thee much: within this wall of flesh
There is a soul counts thee her creditor,
And with advantage means to pay thy love;
And, my good friend, thy voluntary oath
Lives in this bosom, dearly cherished.
Give me thy hand: I had a thing to say—

110 THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV.

But I will fit it with some better time.

By heaven, Hubert, I'm almost asham'd

To say what good respect I have of thee.

HUBERT.

I am much bounden to your majesty.

King JOHN.

Good friend, thou hast no cause to say so yet,—

But thou shalt have—and creep time ne'er so slow,

Yet it shall come for me to do thee good.

I had a thing to say---but let it go :

The sun is in the heav'n, and the proud day,

Attended with the pleasures of the world,

Is all too wanton, and too full of gaudes,

To give me audience. If the midnight bell

Did with his iron tongue and brazen mouth

Sound one unto the drowsy race of night ;

If this same were a church-yard where we stand,

And thou possessed with a thousand wrongs ;

Or if that surly spirit melancholy

Had bak'd thy blood, and made it heavy thick,

Which else runs trickling up and down the veins,

Making that idiot laughter keep men's eyes,

And strain their cheeks to idle merriment,

(A passion hateful to my purposes ;)

Or if thou couldst see me without eyes,

Hear

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV. 111

Hear me without thine ears, and make reply
Without a tongue, using conceit alone,
Without eyes, ears, and harmful sound of words;
Then, in despite of broad-ey'd watchful day,
I would into thy bosom pour my thoughts:
But ah! I will not---yet I love thee well;
And, by my troth, I think thou lov'st me well.

THE SECOND PART OF HENRY IV. III

Hear me without thin ears, and make reply
Without a tongue, and consent alone,
Without eyes, ears, and harmful sound of words;
Then, in despite of beauty's witchful day,
I would into thy heart pour my thoughts:
But ah! I will not--yet I love thee well,
And, by my truth, I think thou lovest me well.

ON THE
PRÆTERNATURAL
BEINGS.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heav'n
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

PHETTER NATURAL
ON THE
PHETTER NATURAL

B E I N G S

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heav'n
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Tells their tale to shapes, and gives to any naming
A local habitation and a name.
Milton, Night's Dream

ON THE
PRÆTERNATURAL
BEINGS.

As the genius of Shakspeare, through the whole extent of the Poet's province, is the object of our enquiry, we should do him great injustice, if we did not attend to his peculiar felicity in those fictions and inventions, from which Poetry derives its highest distinction, and from whence it first assumed its pretensions to divine inspiration, and appeared the associate of Religion.

The ancient poet was admitted into the synod of the gods · he discoursed of their natures, he repeated their counsels, and, without the charge of impiety or presumption, disclosed their dissensions, and published their vices: He peopled the woods with

I 2 nymphs,

nymphs, the rivers with deities; and, that he might still have some being within call to his assistance, he placed responsive echo in the vacant regions of air.

In the infant ages of the world, the credulity of ignorance greedily received every marvellous tale: but, as mankind increased in knowledge, and a long series of traditions had established a certain mythology and history, the poet was no longer permitted to range, uncontrolled, through the boundless dominions of fancy, but became restrained, in some measure, to things believed, or known.---Though the duty of Poetry to please and to surprize still subsisted, the means varied with the state of the world, and it soon grew necessary to make the new inventions lean on the old traditions.---The human mind delights in novelty, and is captivated by the marvellous, but, even in fable itself, requires the credible.--The poet, who can give to splendid inventions, and to fictions new and bold, the air and authority of reality and truth, is master of the genuine
sources

sources of the Castalian spring, and may justly be said to draw his inspiration from *the well-head of pure poesy*.

Shakspeare saw how useful the popular superstitions had been to the ancient poets: he felt that they were necessary to poetry itself. We need only read some modern French heroic poems, to be convinced how poorly epic poetry subsists on the pure elements of history and philosophy.—Tasso, though he had a subject so popular, at the time he wrote, as the deliverance of Jerusalem, was obliged to employ the operations of magic, and the interposition of angels and dæmons, to give the marvellous, the sublime, and, I may add, that religious air to his work, which ennobles the enthusiasm, and sanctifies the fiction of the poet. Ariosto's excursive muse wanders through the regions of romance, attended by all the superb train of chivalry, giants, dwarfs, and enchanters; and however these poets, by severe and frigid critics, may have been condemned for giving ornaments not purely classical,

classical, to their works; I believe every reader of taste admires, not only the fertility of their imagination, but the judgment with which they availed themselves of the superstition of the times, and of the customs and modes of the country, in which they laid the scenes of action.

To recur, as the learned sometimes do, to the theology and fables of other ages, and other countries, has ever a poor effect: Jupiter, Minerva, and Apollo, only embellish a modern story, as a print from their statues adorns the frontispiece.—We admire indeed the art of the sculptors who give their images with grace and majesty; but no devotion is excited, no enthusiasm kindled, by the representations of characters whose divinity we do not acknowledge.

When the pagan temples ceased to be revered, and the Parnassian mount existed no longer, it would have been difficult for the poet of later times to have preserved the divinity of his muse inviolate, if the Western
world

world too had not had its sacred fables. While there is any national superstition which credulity has consecrated, any hallowed tradition long revered by vulgar faith; to that sanctuary, that asylum, may the poet resort. Let him tread the holy ground with reverence; respect the established doctrine; exactly observe the accustomed rites, and the attributes of the object of veneration; then shall he not vainly invoke an inexorable or absent deity. Ghosts, fairies, goblins, elves, were as propitious, were as assistant to Shakspeare, and gave as much of the sublime, and of the marvellous, to his fictions, as nymphs, satyrs, fawns, and even the triple Geryon, to the works of ancient bards. Our poet never carries his præternatural beings beyond the limits of the popular tradition. It is true, that he boldly exerts his poetic genius, and fascinating powers in that magic circle, *in which none e'er durst walk but he*: but as judicious as bold, he contains himself within it. He calls up all the stately phantoms in the regions of superstition, which our faith will receive

receive with reverence. He throws into their manners and language a mysterious solemnity, favourable to superstition in general, with something highly characteristic of each particular being which he exhibits. His witches, his ghosts, and his fairies, seem *spirits of health or goblins damn'd; bring with them airs from heaven, or blasts from hell.* His ghosts are sullen, melancholy, and terrible. Every sentence, uttered by the witches, is a prophecy or a charm; their manners are malignant, their phrases ambiguous, their promises delusive.—The witches' cauldron is a collection of all that is most horrid, in their supposed incantations. Ariel is a spirit, mild, gentle, and sweet, possessed of supernatural powers, but subject to the command of a great magician.

The fairies are sportive and gay; the innocent artificers of harmless frauds, and mirthful delusions. Puck's enumeration of the feats of a fairy is the most agreeable recital of their supposed gambols.

To

To all these beings our Poet has assigned tasks, and appropriated manners adapted to their imputed dispositions and characters; which are continually developing through the whole piece, in a series of operations conducive to the catastrophe. They are not brought in as subordinate or casual agents, but lead the action, and govern the fable; in which respect our countryman has entered more into theatrical propriety than the Greek tragedians.

Every species of poetry has its distinct duties and obligations. The Drama does not, like the Epic, admit of episode, unnecessary persons, or things incredible: for, as it is observed by a critic of great ingenuity and taste* ; “ That which passes in representation, and challenges, as it were, the scrutiny of the eye, must be truth itself, or something very nearly approaching to it.” It should indeed be what our

* Hurd, on Dramatic Imitation.

imagination

imagination will adopt though our reason would reject it. Great caution and dexterity are required in the dramatic poet, to give an air of reality to fictitious existence.

In the bold attempt to give to airy nothing *a local habitation and a person*, regard must be had to fix it in such scenes, and to display it in such actions, as are agreeable to the popular opinion. Witches holding their sabbath, and saluting passengers on the blasted heath ; ghosts, at the midnight hour, visiting the glimpses of the moon, and whispering a bloody secret, derive from propriety of place and action a credibility very propitious to the scheme of the poet. *Reddere personæ—convenientia cuique*, cannot be less his duty in regard to these superior and metaphysical, than to human characters. Indeed, from the invariableness of their natures, a greater consistency and uniformity is necessary ; but most of all, as the belief of their intervention depends entirely on their manners and sentiments suiting with the preconceived opinion of them.

The

The magician Prospero raising a storm ;
witches performing infernal rites ; or any
other exertion of the supposed powers and
qualities of the agent, were easily credited
by the vulgar.

The genius of Shakspeare informed him
that poetic fable must rise above the simple
tale of the nurse ; therefore he adorns the
beldame, tradition, with flowers gathered
on classic ground, but still wisely suffering
those simples of her native soil, to which the
established superstition of her country has
attributed a magic spell, to be predominant.
Can any thing be more poetical than Pros-
pero's address to his attendant spirits before
he dismisses them ?

PROSPERO.

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back ; ye demy-puppets, that
By the moonshine, the green sour ringlet make,

Whereof

Whereof the ewe not bites ; and you, whose aid
 Is to make midnight mushrooms ; that rejoice
 To hear the solemn curfew ; by whose aid
 (Weak masters tho' ye be) I have bedimm'd
 The noon-tide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
 And 'twixt the green-sea and the azur'd vault
 Set roaring war ; to the dread rattling thunder
 Have I giv'n fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
 With his own bolt ; the strong-bas'd promontory
 Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluckt up
 The pine and cedar : graves at my command
 Have wak'd their sleepers ; op'd, and let them forth,
 By my so potent art.

Here the popular stories concerning the power of magicians are agreeably collected. The incantations of the witches in Macbeth are more solemn and terrible than those of the Erichtho of Lucan, or of the Canidia of Horace. It may be said, indeed, that Shakspeare had an advantage derived from the more direful character of his national superstitions.

A celebrated writer, in his ingenious
 letters

letters on Chivalry, has observed, that the Gothic manners, and Gothic superstitions, are more adapted to the uses of poetry, than the Grecian. The devotion of those times was gloomy and fearful, not being purged of the terrors of the Celtic fables. The Priest often availed himself of the dire inventions of his predecessor, the Druid. The church of Rome adopted many of the Celtic superstitions; others, which were not established by it, as points of faith, still maintained a traditional authority, among the vulgar. Climate, temper, modes of life, and institutions of government, seem all to have conspired to make the superstitions of the Celtic nations melancholy and terrible. Philosophy had not mitigated the austerity of ignorant devotion, or tamed the fierce spirit of enthusiasm. As the Bards, who were our philosophers and poets, pretended to be possessed of the dark secrets of magic and divination, they certainly encouraged the ignorant credulity, and anxious fears, to which such impostures owe their suc-

cess and credit. The retired and gloomy scenes appointed for the most solemn rites of devotion; the austerity and rigour of Druidical discipline and jurisdiction; the fasts, the penances, the sad excommunications from the comforts and privileges of civil life; the dreadful anathema, whose vengeance pursued the wretched beyond the grave, which bounds all human power and mortal jurisdiction, must deeply imprint on the mind every form of superstition, which such an hierarchy presented. The bard, who was subservient to the Druid, had mixed them in his heroic song; in his historical annals; in his medical practice: genii assisted his heroes; dæmons decided the fate of the battle; and charms cured the sick, or the wounded. Nay, after the consecrated groves were cut down, and the temples demolished, the tales that sprung from them were still preserved, with religious reverence, in the minds of the people.

The Poet found himself happily situated
amidst

amidst enchantments, ghosts, goblins; every element supposed the residence of a kind of deity; the Genius of the Mountain, the Spirit of the Floods, the oak endued with sacred prophecy, made men walk abroad with a fearful apprehension

Of powers unseen, and mightier far than they.

On the mountains, and in the woods, stalked the angry spectre; and in the gayest and most pleasing scenes, even within the cheerful haunts of men, amongst villages and farms,

Tripp'd the light fairies and the dapper elves.

The reader will easily perceive what resources remained for the Poet, in this visionary land of ideal forms. The general scenery of nature, considered as inanimate, only adorns the descriptive part of poetry; but being, according to the Celtic traditions, animated by a kind of intelligences, the bard could better make use of them, for his
moral

moral purposes. That awe of the immediate presence of the Deity, which, among the vulgar of other nations, is confined to temples and altars, was here diffused over every object. The Celt passed trembling through the woods, and over the mountain, and near the lakes, inhabited by these invisible powers: such apprehensions must indeed

Deepen the murmur of the falling floods,

And shed a browner horror on the woods ;

give sadder accents to every whisper of the animate or inanimate creation, and arm every shadow with terrors.

With great reason, therefore, it has been asserted, that the Western bards had an advantage over Homer, in the superstitions of their country. The religious ceremonies of Greece were more pompous than solemn ; and seemed as much a part of their civil institutions, as belonging to spiritual matters : nor did they impress so deep a sense of invisible

sible being, and prepare the mind to catch the enthusiasm of the poet, and to receive with veneration the phantoms, he presented.

Our countryman has another kind of superiority over the Greek poets, even the earliest of them, who, having imbibed the learning of mysterious Egypt, addicted themselves to allegory; but our Gothic Bard, instead of mere amusive allegory, employs the potent agency of sacred fable. When the world becomes learned and philosophical, fable refines into allegory. But the age of fable is the golden age of poetry: when reason, and the steady lamp of inquisitive philosophy, throw their penetrating rays upon the phantoms of imagination, they discover them to have been mere shadows, formed by ignorance. The thunderbolts of Jove, forged in Cimmerian caves; the cestus of Venus, woven by the hands of the attracting Graces, cease to terrify and allure. Echo, from an amorous nymph, fades into voice, and nothing more; the very

K

threads

threads of Iris's scarf are untwisted ; all the poet's spells are broken, his charms dissolved : deserted on his own enchanted ground, he takes refuge in the groves of Philosophy ; but there his divinities evaporate in allegory, in which mystic and insubstantial state, they do but weakly assist his operations. By associating his muse to philosophy, he hopes she may establish with the learned, the worship she won from the ignorant ; so he makes her quit the old traditional fable, whence she derived her first authority and power, to follow airy hypotheses, and chimerical systems. Allegory, the daughter of Fable, is admired by the fastidious wit and abstruse scholar, when her mother begins to be treated as superannuated, foolish, and doting ; but however well she may please and amuse, not being worshipped as divine, she does not awe and terrify like sacred mythology, nor ever can establish the same fearful devotion, nor assume such arbitrary power over the mind. Her person is not adapted to the stage, nor her qualities to the business and end of dramatic representation.

L'Abbé

L'Abbé du Bos has judiciously distinguished the reasons, why allegory is not fit for the drama. What the critic investigated by art and study, the wisdom of nature unfolded to our unlettered Poet, or he would not have resisted the prevalent fashion of his allegorizing age; especially as Spenser's *Fairy Queen* was the admired work of the times.

Allegorical beings, performing acts of chivalry, fell in with the taste of an age that affected abstruse learning, romantic valour, and high-flown gallantry. Prince Arthur, the British Hercules, was brought from ancient ballads and romances, to be allegorized into the knight of magnanimity, at the court of Gloriana. His knights followed him thither, in the same moralized garb: and even the questynge beast received no less honour and improvement from the allegorizing art of Spenser, as has been shewn by a critic of great learning, ingenuity, and taste, in his observations on the *Fairy Queen*.

Our first theatrical entertainments, after we emerged from gross barbarism, were of the allegorical kind. The Christmas carol, and Carnival shows, the pious pastimes of our holy-days, were turned into pageantries and masques, all symbolical and allegorical. Our stage rose from hymns to the Virgin, and encomiums on the Patriarchs and Saints ; as the Grecian tragedies from the hymns to Bacchus. Our early poets added narration and action to this kind of psalmody, as Æschylus had done to the song of the goat. Much more rapid indeed was the progress of the Grecian stage towards perfection.—Philosophy, poetry, eloquence, all the fine arts, were in their meridian glory, when the Drama first began to dawn at Athens, and gloriously it shone forth, illumined by every kind of intellectual light.

Shakspeare, in the dark shades of Gothic barbarism, had no resources but in the very phantoms, that walked the night of ignorance

rance and superstition : or in touching the latent passions of civil rage and discord : sure to please best his fierce and barbarous audience, when he raised the bloody ghost, or reared the warlike standard. His choice of these subjects was judicious, if we consider the times in which he lived ; his management of them so masterly, that he will be admired in all times.

In the same age, Ben Jonson, more proud of his learning than confident of his genius, was desirous to give a metaphysical air to his works. He composed many pieces of the allegorical kind, established on the Grecian mythology, and rendered his play-house a perfect pantheon.—Shakspeare disdained these quaint devices : an admirable judge of human nature, with a capacity most extensive, and an invention most happy, he contented himself with giving dramatic manners to history, sublimity and its appropriated powers and charms to fiction ; and in both these arts he is unequalled.—The Catiline and Sejanus of
Jonson

Jonson are cold, crude, heavy pieces; turgid where they should be great; bombast where they should be sublime; the sentiments extravagant; the manners exaggerated; and the whole undramatically conducted by long senatorial speeches, and flat plagiarisms from Tacitus and Sallust. Such of this author's pieces as he boasts to be *grounded on antiquity and solid learning, and to lay hold on removed mysteries**, have neither the majesty of Shakspeare's serious fables, nor the pleasing sportfulness and poetical imagination of his fairy tales. Indeed if we compare our countryman in this respect, with the most admired writers of antiquity, we shall, perhaps, not find him inferior to them.—Æschylus, with greater impetuosity of genius than even Shakspeare, makes bold incursions into the blind chaos of mingled allegory and fable, but he is not so happy in diffusing the solemn shade; in casting the dim, religious light that should reign there. When he introduces his Furies, and other

* Prologue to the Masque of Queens.

supernatural beings, he exposes them by too glaring a light; causes affright in the spectator, but never rises to the imparting that unlimited terror, which we feel when Macbeth, to his bold address,

How now! ye secret, foul, and midnight hags,

What is't ye do?

is answered,

A deed without a name.

The witches of the forest are as important in the tragedy of Macbeth, as the Eumenides in the drama of Æschylus; but our Poet is infinitely more dexterous and judicious in the conduct of their part. The secret, foul, and midnight hags are not introduced into the castle of Macbeth; they never appear but in their allotted region of solitude and night, nor act beyond their sphere of ambiguous prophecy, and malignant sorcery. The Eumenides, snoring in the temple of Apollo, and then appearing as evidences against Orestes in the Areopagus, seem both acting out of their sphere,
and

and below their character. It was the appointed office of the venerable goddesses, to avenge the *crimes unwhipt of justice*, not to demand the public trial of guilty men. They must lose much of the fear and reverence in which they were held for their secret influence on the mind, and the terrors they could inflict on criminal conscience, when they were represented as obliged to have recourse to the ordinary method of revenge, by being witnesses and pleaders in a court of justice, to obtain the corporal punishment of the offender. Indeed, it is possible, that the whole story of this play might be allegorical ; as thus : that Orestes, haunted by the terrors which pursue the guilty mind, confessed his crime to the Areopagus, with all the aggravating circumstances remorse suggested to him, from a pious desire to expiate his offence, by submitting to whatever sentence this respectable assembly should pronounce for that purpose. The oracle which commanded him to put Clytemnestra to death, would plead for him with his judges ; their voices being
equal

equal for absolving or punishing, wisdom gives her vote for absolving him.

The sentiment that appears so odd in the mouth of the goddess, from these considerations, that she is little affected by the circumstance of Clytemnestra's relation to the murderer, because she herself had no mother, means only that justice is not governed by any affection or personal consideration, but acts by an invariable and general rule. If the oracle commanded, and the laws justified the act of Orestes, by appointing the next in blood to avenge the murder; then other circumstances of a special, and inferior kind, were not to have any weight. I am inclined to think this tragedy is a mixture of history and allegory. Æschylus affected the allegorical manner so much, as to form a tragedy, called the Balance, upon the allegory, in Homer, of Jupiter's weighing the fates of Hector and Achilles*; and it is apparent, that the Prometheus of this author, is the ancient allegory of Prometheus

* Apud Plut. de Modo leg. Poëtas.

wrought

wrought into a drama. Prometheus makes his first appearance with two symbolical persons, Violence and Force, which are, apparently, of the poet's fiction. Père Bru-moy intimates a suspicion that this tragedy is an allegory, but imagines it alludes to Xerxes or Darius, because it abounds with reflections on tyranny. To flatter the republican spirit, all the Grecian tragedies are full of such reflections. But an oblique censure on the Persian monarch could not have excused the direct imputations thrown on the character of Jupiter, if the circumstances of the story had been taken in a literal sense; nor can it be supposed that the Athenians would have endured the most violent affronts to have been offered to the character of that deity to whom they every day offered sacrifice. An allegory being sometimes a mere physical hypothesis, might without impiety be treated with freedom. — It is probable that many allegories brought from the hieroglyphic land of Egypt, were, in the grosser times of Greece, literally understood by the vulgar; but, in
more

more philosophic ages, were again transmuted into allegory ; which will account for the mythology of the Greeks and Ægyptians varying greatly, but still preserving such a resemblance as shews them to be derived from the same origin.

Jealous of the neighbouring states, and ever attentive to the glory and interest of their commonwealth, an Athenian audience listened with pleasure to any circumstances, in their theatrical entertainments, which reflected honour on their country. The institution of the Areopagus by the express commands of Minerva ; a perpetual amity, promised by Orestes, between Argos and Athens, in the tragedy of the Eumenides ; and a prophecy of Prometheus, which threw a lustre on the author of the race of the Heraclidæ, were circumstances, without question, sedulously sought by the poet, and favourably received by the spectator. But though such subjects might be chosen, or invented, as would introduce some favorable incidents, or flattering reflections, this intention

tention did not always reign through the whole drama.

It was just now observed, that Shakspeare has an advantage over the Greek poets, in the more solemn, gloomy, and mysterious air of his national superstitions ; but this avails him only with critics of deep penetration and true taste, and with whom sentiment has more sway than authority. The learned have received the popular tales of Greece from their poets ; ours are derived to them from the illiterate vulgar. The phantom of Darius in the tragedy of the Persians, evoked by ancient rites, is beheld with reverence by the scholar, and endured by the *bel esprit*. To these the ghost of Hamlet is an object of contempt or ridicule. Let us candidly examine these royal shades, as exhibited to us by those great masters in the art of exciting pity and terror, Æschylus and Shakspeare ; and impartially decide which poet throws most of the sublime into the præternatural character ; and, also, which has the art to render it most efficient
in

in the drama. This enquiry may be the more interesting, because the French wits have often mentioned Hamlet's ghost as an instance of the barbarism of our theatre. The Persians, of Æschylus, is certainly one of the most august spectacles that ever was represented on a theatre; nobly imagined, happily sustained, regularly conducted, deeply interesting to the Athenian people, and favourable to their great scheme of resisting the power of the Persian monarch. It would be absurd to depreciate this excellent piece, or to bring into a general comparison with it, a drama of so different a kind as the tragedy of Hamlet. But it is surely allowable to compare the Persian phantom with the Danish ghost; and to examine, whether any thing but prejudice, in favour of the ancients, protects the superstitious circumstances relative to the one, from the same ridicule with which the others have been treated. Atossa, the widow of Darius, relates to the sages of the Persian council, a dream and an omen; they advise her to consult the shade of her dead lord, upon what is to be done in the unfortunate

wrought into a drama. Prometheus makes his first appearance with two symbolical persons, Violence and Force, which are, apparently, of the poet's fiction. Père Bru-moy intimates a suspicion that this tragedy is an allegory, but imagines it alludes to Xerxes or Darius, because it abounds with reflections on tyranny. To flatter the republican spirit, all the Grecian tragedies are full of such reflections. But an oblique censure on the Persian monarch could not have excused the direct imputations thrown on the character of Jupiter, if the circumstances of the story had been taken in a literal sense; nor can it be supposed that the Athenians would have endured the most violent affronts to have been offered to the character of that deity to whom they every day offered sacrifice. An allegory being sometimes a mere physical hypothesis, might without impiety be treated with freedom. — It is probable that many allegories brought from the hieroglyphic land of Egypt, were, in the grosser times of Greece, literally understood by the vulgar; but, in
more

more philosophic ages, were again transmuted into allegory ; which will account for the mythology of the Greeks and Ægyptians varying greatly, but still preserving such a resemblance as shews them to be derived from the same origin.

Jealous of the neighbouring states, and ever attentive to the glory and interest of their commonwealth, an Athenian audience listened with pleasure to any circumstances, in their theatrical entertainments, which reflected honour on their country. The institution of the Areopagus by the express commands of Minerva ; a perpetual amity, promised by Orestes, between Argos and Athens, in the tragedy of the Eumenides ; and a prophecy of Prometheus, which threw a lustre on the author of the race of the Heraclidæ, were circumstances, without question, sedulously sought by the poet, and favourably received by the spectator. But though such subjects might be chosen, or invented, as would introduce some favorable incidents, or flattering reflections, this intention

tention did not always reign through the whole drama.

It was just now observed, that Shakspeare has an advantage over the Greek poets, in the more solemn, gloomy, and mysterious air of his national superstitions ; but this avails him only with critics of deep penetration and true taste, and with whom sentiment has more sway than authority. The learned have received the popular tales of Greece from their poets ; ours are derived to them from the illiterate vulgar. The phantom of Darius in the tragedy of the Persians, evoked by ancient rites, is beheld with reverence by the scholar, and endured by the bel esprit. To these the ghost of Hamlet is an object of contempt or ridicule. Let us candidly examine these royal shades, as exhibited to us by those great masters in the art of exciting pity and terror, Æschylus and Shakspeare ; and impartially decide which poet throws most of the sublime into the præternatural character ; and, also, which has the art to render it most efficient
in

in the drama. This enquiry may be the more interesting, because the French wits have often mentioned Hamlet's ghost as an instance of the barbarism of our theatre. The Persians, of Æschylus, is certainly one of the most august spectacles that ever was represented on a theatre; nobly imagined, happily sustained, regularly conducted, deeply interesting to the Athenian people, and favourable to their great scheme of resisting the power of the Persian monarch. It would be absurd to depreciate this excellent piece, or to bring into a general comparison with it, a drama of so different a kind as the tragedy of Hamlet. But it is surely allowable to compare the Persian phantom with the Danish ghost; and to examine, whether any thing but prejudice, in favour of the ancients, protects the superstitious circumstances relative to the one, from the same ridicule with which the others have been treated. Atossa, the widow of Darius, relates to the sages of the Persian council, a dream and an omen; they advise her to consult the shade of her dead lord, upon what is to be done in the unfortunate

fortunate situation of Xerxes just defeated by the Greeks. In the third act she enters offering to the manès a libation composed of milk, honey, wine, oil, &c. Upon this, Darius issues from his tomb. Let the wits, who are so smart on our ghost's disappearing at the cock's crowing, explain why, in reason, a ghost in Persia, or in Greece, should be more fond of milk and honey, than averse, in Denmark, to the crowing of a cock. Each poet adopted, in his work, the superstition relative to his subject; and the poet who does so, understands his business much better than the critic, who, in judging of that work, refuses it his attention. The phantom of Darius comes forth in his regal robes to Atossa and the satraps in council, who, in the eastern manner, pay their silent adorations to their emperor. His quality of ghost does not appear to make any impression upon them; and the satraps so exactly preserve the characters of courtiers, that they do not venture to tell him the true state of the affairs of his kingdom, and its recent disgraces: finding he cannot get any information from them, he addresses himself

to Atossa, who does not break forth with that passion and tenderness one should expect, on the sight of her long-lost husband ; but very calmly informs him, after some flattery on the constant prosperity of his reign, of the calamitous state of Persia under Xerxes, who has been stimulated by his courtiers, to make war upon Greece. The phantom, who was to appear ignorant of what was past, that the ear of the Athenians might be soothed and flattered with the detail of their victory at Salamis, is allowed, for the same reason, such prescience, as to foretell their future triumph at Platea. Whatever else he adds by way of counsel or reproof, either in itself, or in the mode of delivering it, is nothing more than might be expected from any experienced counsellor of state. Darius advises the old men to enjoy whatever they can, because riches are of no use in the grave. As this touches the most absurd and ridiculous foible in human nature, the increase of a greedy and solicitous desire of wealth, when the period of enjoyment of it becomes more precarious and short, the admonition has something of
a comic

a comic and satirical turn, unbecoming the solemn character of the speaker, and the sad exigency upon which he was called. The intervention of this præternatural being gives nothing of the marvellous or the sublime to the piece, nor adds to, or is connected with its interest. The supernatural, divested of *the august* and *the terrible*, make but a poor figure in any species of poetry; useless and unconnected with the fable, it wants propriety, in dramatic poetry. Shakspeare had so just a taste, that he never introduced any præternatural character on the stage, that did not assist in the conduct of the drama. Indeed he had such prodigious force of talents, that he could make every being his fancy created, subservient to his designs. The uncouth, awkward monster, Caliban, is so subject to his genius, as to assist in bringing things to the proposed end and perfection. And the slight fairies, *weak masters though they be*, even in their wanton gambols and idle sports, perform great tasks by *his so potent art*.

But to return to the intended comparison between the Grecian shade, and the Danish ghost.

ghost. The first propriety in the conduct of this kind of machinery seems to be, that the præternatural person be intimately connected with the fable; that he increase the interest, add to the solemnity of it, and that his efficiency, in bringing on the catastrophe, be in some measure adequate to the violence done to the ordinary course of things, in his visible interposition. These are points peculiarly important in dramatic poetry, as has been before observed. To these ends it is necessary, this being should stand acknowledged and revered by the national superstition, and thus every operation that developes the attributes, which vulgar opinion, or the nurse's legend, have taught us to ascribe to him, will augment our pleasure; whether we give the reins to our imagination, and, as spectators, willingly yield ourselves up to pleasing delusion, or, as critics, examine the merit of the composition. I hope it is not difficult to shew, that in all these capital points our author has excelled. At the solemn midnight hour, Horatio and Marcellus, the

L

school-

schoolfellows of young Hamlet, come to the centinels upon guard, excited by a report that a Ghost of their late Monarch had, some preceding nights, appeared to them. Horatio, not being one of the believing vulgar, gives little credit to the story, but bids Bernardo proceed in his relation.

BERNARDO.

Last night of all,
When yon same star, that's westward from the pole,
Had made his course t'illumine that part of heav'n,
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one——

Here enters the Ghost, after you are thus prepared. There is something solemn and sublime in thus regulating the walking of the spirit, by the course of the star: it intimates a connection and correspondence between things beyond our ken, *and above the visible diurnal sphere*. Horatio is affected with that kind of fear, which such an appearance would naturally excite. He trembles, and turns pale. When the violence of the emotion subsides, he reflects, that probably this supernatural event portends some
danger

danger lurking in the state. This suggestion gives importance to the phænomenon, and engages our attention. Horatio's relation of the king's combat with the Norwegian, and of the forces the young Fortinbras is assembling, in order to attack Denmark, seems to point out, from what quarter the apprehended peril is to arise. Such appearances, says he, preceded the fall of mighty Julius, and the ruin of the great commonwealth; and he adds, such have often been the omens of disasters in our own state. There is great art in this conduct. The true cause of the royal Dane's discontent could not be guessed at: it was a secret which could be only revealed by himself. In the mean time, it was necessary to captivate our attention, by demonstrating, that the poet was not going to exhibit such idle and frivolous gambols, as ghosts are by the vulgar often represented to perform. The historical testimony, that antecedent to the death of Cæsar,

The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets,

gives credibility and importance to this phænomenon. Horatio's address to the Ghost is brief and pertinent, and the whole purport of it agreeable to the vulgar conceptions of these matters.

HORATIO.

Stay, Illusion!

If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,

Speak to me.

If there be any good thing to be done,

That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,

Speak to me.

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,

Which happily foreknowing may avoid,

Oh speak!

Or, if thou hast uphoarded in thy life

Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,

For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

Speak of it.

Its vanishing at the crowing of the cock, is another circumstance of the established superstition.

Young Hamlet's indignation at his mother's

ther's hasty and incestuous marriage, his sorrow for his father's death, the character he gives of that prince, prepare the spectator to sympathize with his wrongs and sufferings. The son, as is natural, with much more vehement emotion than Horatio did, addresses his father's shade. Hamlet's terror, his astonishment, his vehement desire to know the cause of this visitation, are irresistibly communicated to the spectator by the following speech.

HAMLET.

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
 Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd,
 Bring with thee airs from heav'n or blasts from hell,
 Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
 Thou com'st in such a questionable shape,
 That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
 King, father, royal Dane : oh ! answer me ;
 Let me not burst in ignorance ; but tell,
 Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
 Have burst their cearments ? Why the sepulchre,
 Wherein we saw thee quietly in-urn'd,
 Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws,
 To cast thee up again ? What may this mean,

That

150 ON THE PRÆTERNATURAL BEINGS.

That thou, dead corse, again, in complete steel,
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous ?

Never did the Grecian muse of tragedy
relate a tale so full of pity and terror, as is
imparted by the Ghost. Every circumstance
melts us with compassion ; and with what
horror do we hear him say !

GHOST.

But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine :
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood.

All that follows is solemn, sad, and deeply
affecting.

Whatever in Hamlet belongs to the præ-
ternatural,

ternatural, is perfectly fine ; the rest of the play does not come within the subject of this chapter.

The ingenious criticism on the play of the Tempest, published in the Adventurer, has made it unnecessary to enlarge on that admirable piece, which alone would prove our author to have had a fertile, a sublime, and original genius.

gives credibility and importance to this phænomenon. Horatio's address to the Ghost is brief and pertinent, and the whole purport of it agreeable to the vulgar conceptions of these matters.

HORATIO.

Stay, Illusion!

If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,

Speak to me.

If there be any good thing to be done,

That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,

Speak to me.

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,

Which happily foreknowing may avoid,

Oh speak!

Or, if thou hast uphoarded in thy life

Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,

For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

Speak of it.

Its vanishing at the crowing of the cock, is another circumstance of the established superstition.

Young Hamlet's indignation at his mother's

ther's hasty and incestuous marriage, his sorrow for his father's death, the character he gives of that prince, prepare the spectator to sympathize with his wrongs and sufferings. The son, as is natural, with much more vehement emotion than Horatio did, addresses his father's shade. Hamlet's terror, his astonishment, his vehement desire to know the cause of this visitation, are irresistibly communicated to the spectator by the following speech.

HAMLET.

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
 Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd,
 Bring with thee airs from heav'n or blasts from hell,
 Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
 Thou com'st in such a questionable shape,
 That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
 King, father, royal Dane : oh ! answer me ;
 Let me not burst in ignorance ; but tell,
 Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
 Have burst their cearments ? Why the sepulchre,
 Wherein we saw thee quietly in-urn'd,
 Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws,
 To cast thee up again ? What may this mean,

That

150 ON THE PRÆTERNATURAL BEINGS.

That thou, dead corse, again, in complete steel,
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous ?

Never did the Grecian muse of tragedy
relate a tale so full of pity and terror, as is
imparted by the Ghost. Every circumstance
melts us with compassion ; and with what
horror do we hear him say !

GHOST.

But that I am forbid

To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine :
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood.

All that follows is solemn, sad, and deeply
affecting.

Whatever in Hamlet belongs to the præ-
ternatural,

ternatural, is perfectly fine ; the rest of the play does not come within the subject of this chapter.

The ingenious criticism on the play of the Tempest, published in the Adventurer, has made it unnecessary to enlarge on that admirable piece, which alone would prove our author to have had a fertile, a sublime, and original genius.

terminal is perfectly fine; the rest of the
play does not come within the subject of
this chapter.

The ingenious criticism on the play of
the Tempest, published in the *Advertiser*,
has made it necessary to enlarge on that
admirable piece, which alone would prove
our author to have had a fertile, a sublime,
and original genius.

THE
TRAGEDY
OF
M A C B E T H.

THE
TRAGEDY

M A C B E T H

THE
TRAGEDY
OF
MACBETH.

THIS piece is perhaps one of the greatest exertions of the tragic and poetic powers, that any age, or any country has produced. Here are opened new sources of terror, new creations of fancy. The agency of Witches and Spirits excites a species of terror, that cannot be effected by the operation of human agency, or by any form or disposition of human things. For the known limits of their powers and capacities set certain bounds to our apprehensions ; mysterious horrors, undefined terrors, are raised by the intervention of beings, whose nature we do not understand, whose actions we cannot control, and whose influence

influence we know not how to escape. Here we feel through all the faculties of the soul, and to the utmost extent of her capacity. The dread of the interposition of such agents is the most salutary of all fears. It keeps up in our minds a sense of our connection with awful and invisible spirits, to whom our most secret actions are apparent, and from whose chastisement, innocence alone can defend us. From many dangers power will protect; many crimes may be concealed by art and hypocrisy; but when supernatural beings arise, to reveal, and to avenge, guilt blushes through her mask, and trembles behind her bulwarks.

Shakspeare has been sufficiently justified by the best critics, for availing himself of the popular faith in witchcraft; and he is certainly as defensible in this point, as Euripides, and other Greek tragedians, for introducing Jupiter, Diana, Minerva, &c. whose personal intervention, in the events exhibited on their stage, had not obtained more credit, with the thinking and the philosophical part of the spectators, than tales of
witchcraft

witchcraft among the wise and learned here. Much later than the age in which Macbeth lived, even in Shakspeare's own time, there were severe statutes extant against witchcraft.

Some objections have been made to the Hecate of the Greeks being joined to the witches of our country.

Milton, a more correct writer, has often mixed the pagan deities, even with the most sacred characters of our religion. Our witches' power was supposed to be exerted only in little and low mischief. this therefore being the only example where their interposition is recorded, in the revolutions of a kingdom, the poet thought, perhaps, that the story would pass off better, with the learned at least, if he added the celebrated Hecate to the weird sisters ; and she is introduced, chiding their presumption, for trading in prophecies and affairs of death. The dexterity is admirable, with which the predictions of the witches (as Macbeth observes) prove true to the ear, but false to the hope,

hope, according to the general condition of all vain oracles. And it is with great judgment the poet has given to Macbeth the very temper to be wrought upon by such suggestions. The bad man is his own tempter. Richard III. had a heart that prompted him to do all, that the worst demon could have suggested, so that the witches would have been only an idle wonder in his story; nor did he want such a counsellor as Lady Macbeth: a ready instrument like Buckingham, to adopt his projects, and execute his orders, was sufficient. But Macbeth, of a generous disposition, and good propensities, but with vehement passions and aspiring wishes, was a subject liable to be seduced by splendid prospects, and ambitious counsels. This appears from the following character given of him by his wife:

Yet do I fear thy nature;

It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness

To catch the nearest way. Thou would'st be great;

Art not without ambition; but without

The illness should attend it. What thou would'st
highly

That

That wouldst thou holily ; would'st not play false,
And yet would'st wrongly win.

So much inherent ambition in a character, without any other vice, and full of the milk of human kindness, though obnoxious to temptation, yet would have great struggles before it yielded, and as violent fits of subsequent remorse.

If the mind is to be medicated by the operations of pity and terror, surely no means are so well adapted to that end, as a strong and lively representation of the agonizing struggles that precede, and the terrible horrors that follow wicked actions. Other poets thought they had sufficiently attended to the moral purpose of the Drama, by making the furies pursue the perpetrated crime. Our author waves their bloody daggers in the road to guilt, and demonstrates, that so soon as a man begins to hearken to ill suggestions, terrors environ, and fears distract him. Tenderness and conjugal love combat in the breasts of a Medea and a Herod, in their purposed vengeance. Per-
1 sonal

sonal affection often weeps on the theatre, while jealousy or revenge whet the bloody knife: but Macbeth's emotions are the struggles of conscience; his agonies are the agonies of remorse. They are lessons of justice, and warnings to innocence. I do not know that any dramatic writer, except Shakspeare, has set forth the pangs of guilt separate from the fear of punishment. Clytemnestra is represented by Euripides, as under great terrors, on account of the murder of Agamemnon; but they arise from fear of punishment, not repentance. It is not the memory of the assassinated husband, which haunts and terrifies her, but an apprehension of vengeance from his surviving son: when she is told Orestes is dead, her mind is again at ease. It must be allowed, that on the Grecian stage, it is the office of the chorus to moralize, and to point out, on every occasion, the advantages of virtue over vice. But how much less affecting are their animadversions than the testimony of the person concerned! Whatever belongs to the part of the chorus, has hardly the force of dramatic imitation. The chorus is in a manner

manner without personal character, or interest, and no way an agent in the drama. We cannot sympathize with the cool reflections of these idle spectators, as we do with the sentiments of the persons, in whose circumstances and situation we are interested.

The heart of man, like iron and other metal, is hard, and of firm resistance, when cold, but, warmed, it becomes malleable and ductile: It is by touching the passions, and exciting sympathetic emotions, not by sentences, that the tragedian must make his impressions on the spectator. I will appeal to any person of taste, whether the following speeches of Wolsey, in another play of Shakspeare, the first a soliloquy, the second addressed to his servant Cromwell, in which he gives the testimony of his experience, and the result of his own feelings, would make the same impression, if uttered by a set of speculative sages in the episode of a chorus.

WOLSEY.

So farewell to the little good you bear me !

Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness !

M

This

162 THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH.

This is the state of man : to-day he puts forth
 The tender leaves of hope ; to-morrow blossoms,
 And bears his blushing honours thick upon him ;
 The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
 And, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
 His greatness is a ripening, nips his root ;
 And then he falls, as I do.—I have ventur'd,
 Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
 These many summers in a sea of glory,
 But far beyond my depth ; my high-blown pride
 At length broke under me, and now has left me,
 Weary and old with service, to the mercy
 Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
 Vain pomp and glory of this world ! I hate ye ;
 I feel my heart new open'd. Oh, how wretched
 Is that poor man, that hangs on princes' favours !
 There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
 That sweet aspect of princes, and our ruin,
 More pangs and fears than war or women have :
 And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
 Never to hope again.

And in another place,

Let's dry our eyes, and thus far hear me, Cromwell,
 And when I am forgotten, as I shall be,

And

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH. 163

And sleep in dull cold marble, where no mention
 Of me must more be heard, say then, I taught thee ;
 Say, Wolsey, that once trod the ways of glory,
 And sounded all the depths and shoals of honour,
 Found thee a way, out of his wreck, to rise in ;
 A sure and safe one, though thy master miss'd it.
 Mark but my fall, and that which ruin'd me ;
 Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition,
 By that sin fell the angels ; how can man then,
 The image of his Maker, hope to win by't ?
 Love thyself last ; cherish those hearts, that hate thee ;
 Corruption wins not more than honesty.
 Still in thy right-hand carry gentle peace,
 To silence envious tongues ; be just, and fear not.
 Let all the ends, thou aim'st at, be thy country's,
 Thy God's, and truth's ; then, if thou fall'st, O Crom-
 well,
 Thou fall'st a blessed martyr. Serve the king ;
 And pr'ythee, lead me in ;
 There take an inventory of all I have,
 To the last penny, 'tis the king's. My robe,
 And my integrity to heav'n, is all
 I dare now call mine own. O Cromwell, Cromwell,
 Had I but serv'd my God with half the zeal
 I serv'd my king, he would not in mine age
 Have left me naked to mine enemies.

I select these two passages as containing reflections of such a general kind, as might be with least impropriety transferred to the chorus ; but if even these would lose much of their force and pathos, if not spoken by the fallen statesman, how much more would those do, which are the expressions of some instantaneous emotion, occasioned by the peculiar situation of the person by whom they are uttered ! The self-condemnation of a murderer makes a very deep impression upon us when we are told by Macbeth himself, that hearing, while he was killing Duncan, one of the grooms cry *God bless us,* and *Amen* the other, he durst not say *Amen*. Had a formal chorus observed, that a man in such a guilty moment, durst not implore that mercy of which he stood so much in need, it would have had but a slight effect. All know the detestation, with which virtuous men behold a bad action. A much more salutary admonition is given, when we are shewn the terrors that are combined with guilt in the breast of the offender.

Our Author has so tempered the constitutional

tutional character of Macbeth, by infusing into it the milk of human kindness, and a strong tincture of honour, as to make the most violent perturbation, and pungent remorse, naturally attend on those steps to which he is led by the force of temptation. Here we must commend the poet's judgment, and his invariable attention to consistency of character: but more amazing still is the art with which he exhibits the movement of the human mind, and renders audible the silent march of thought; traces its modes of operation in the course of deliberating, the pauses of hesitation, and the final act of decision; shews how reason checks, and how the passions impel; and displays to us the trepidations that precede, and the horrors that pursue, acts of blood. No species of dialogue, but that which a man holds with himself, could effect this. The soliloquy has been permitted to all dramatic writers; but its true use seems to be understood only by our Author, who alone has attained to a just imitation of nature, in this kind of self-conference,

It

It is certain, that men do not tell themselves who they are, and whence they came; they neither narrate nor declaim in the solitude of the closet, as Greek and French writers represent. Here then is added to the drama an imitation of the most difficult and delicate kind, that of representing the internal process of the mind in reasoning and reflecting; and it is not only a difficult, but a very useful art, as it best assists the poet to expose the anguish of remorse, to repeat every whisper of the internal monitor, conscience, and, upon occasion, to lend her a voice *to amaze the guilty and appal the free*. As a man is averse to expose his crimes, and discover the turpitude of his actions, even to the faithful friend, and trusty confident, it is more natural for him to breathe in soliloquy the dark and heavy secrets of the soul, than to utter them to the most intimate associate. The conflicts in the bosom of Macbeth, before he commits the murder, could not, by any other means, have been so well exposed. He entertains the prophecy of his future greatness with complacency; but the very idea of the means by

3

which

which he is to attain it, shocks him to the highest degree.

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill ; cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it giv'n me the earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth ? I'm Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature ?

There is an obscurity and stiffness in part of these soliloquies, which I wish could be charged entirely to the confusion of Macbeth's mind from the horror he feels, at the thought of the murder ; but our Author is too much addicted to the obscure bombast, much affected by all sorts of writers in that age. The abhorrence Macbeth feels at the suggestion of assassinating his King, brings him back to this determination ;

If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown
me,
Without my stir.

After

168 THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH.

After a pause, in which we may suppose the ambitious desire of a crown to return, so far as to make him undetermined what he shall do, and leave the decision to future time and unborn events, he concludes,

Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs thro' the roughest day.

By which, I confess, I do not, with his two last commentators, imagine it meant either the tautology of time and the hour, or an allusion to time painted with an hour-glass, or an exhortation to time to hasten forward ; but I rather apprehend the meaning to be, *tempus et hora*, time and occasion, will carry the thing through, and bring it to some determined point and end, let its nature be what it will.

In the next soliloquy, he agitates this great question concerning the proposed murder. One argument against it is, that such deeds must be supported by others of like nature ;

But, in these cases,
We still have judgment here ; that we but teach
Bloody

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH. 169

Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor; this even-handed justice
Commends th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips.

He proceeds next to consider the peculiar
relations, in which he stands to Duncan:

He's here in double trust:

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murd'rer shut the door;
Not bear the knife myself.

Then follow his arguments against the deed,
from the admirable qualities of the King:

Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meekly, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead, like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
The deep damnation of his taking off.

So, says he, with many reasons to dissuade, I
have none to urge me to this act, but a
vaulting ambition; which, by a daring leap,
often

170 THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH.

often procures itself a fall. And thus having determined, he tells Lady Macbeth ;

We will proceed no further in this business.

He hath honour'd me of late ; and I have bought

Golden opinions from all sorts of people,

Which would be worn, now in their newest gloss,

Not cast aside so soon.

Macbeth, in debating with himself, chiefly dwells upon the guilt, yet touches something on the danger, of assassinating the King. When he argues with Lady Macbeth, knowing her too wicked to be affected by the one, and too daring to be deterred by the other, he urges, with great propriety, what he thinks may have more weight with one of her disposition ; the favour he is in with the King, and the esteem he has lately acquired of the people. In answer to her charge of cowardice, he finely distinguishes between manly courage and brutal ferocity.

MACBETH.

I dare do all that may become a man ;

Who dares do more, is none.

At

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH. 171

At length, overcome, rather than persuaded,
he determines on the bloody deed:

I am settled, and bend up
Each corp'ral agent to this terrible feat.

How terrible to him, how repugnant to his nature, we plainly perceive, when, even in the moment that he summons up the resolution needful to perform it, horrid phantasms present themselves: murder alarmed by his sentinel the wolf stealing towards his design; witchcraft celebrating pale Hecate's offerings; the midnight ravisher invading sleeping innocence, seem his associates; and bloody daggers lead him to the very chamber of the King. At his return thence, the sense of the crime he has committed appears suitable to his repugnance at undertaking it. He tells Lady Macbeth, that, of the grooms who slept in Duncan's chamber,—

MACBETH.

There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cry'd, Murder!
They wak'd each other; and I stood and heard them;
But they did say their prayers, and address them
Again to sleep.

LADY.

172 THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH.

LADY.

There are two lodg'd together.

MACBETH.

One cry'd, God bless us! and, Amen! the other;
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
Listening their fear, I could not say, Amen,
When they did say, God bless us!

LADY.

Consider it not so deeply.

MACBETH.

But wherefore could not I pronounce, Amen?
I had most need of blessings, and Amen
Stuck in my throat.

MACBETH.

Methought, I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more!
Macbeth doth murder sleep; the innocent sleep.

Then he replies, when his Lady bids him
carry back the daggers;

MACBETH,

I'll go no more.

I am afraid to think what I have done!

Look on't again I dare not.

How natural is the exclamation of a person,
who, from the fearless state of unsuspecting
innocence,

innocence, is fallen into the suspicious condition of guilt, when, upon hearing a knocking at the gate, he cries out ;

MACBETH.

How is it with me, when every noise appals me ?

The Poet has contrived to throw a tincture of remorse even into Macbeth's resolution to murder Banquo.—He does not proceed in it like a man who, impenitent in crimes, and wanton in success, gaily goes forward in his violent career; but seems impelled onward, and stimulated to this additional villainy, by an apprehension, that, if Banquo's posterity should inherit the crown, he has sacrificed his virtue, and defiled his own soul in vain.

MACBETH.

If 'tis so,
For Banquo's issue have I 'fil'd my mind;
For them, the gracious Duncan have I murder'd ;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them ; and mine eternal jewel
Giv'n to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings.

His

174 THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH.

His desire to keep Lady Macbeth innocent of this intended murder, and yet, from the fulness of a throbbing heart, uttering what may render suspected the very thing he wishes to conceal, shews how deeply the Author enters into human nature in general, and in every circumstance preserves the consistency of the character he exhibits.

How strongly is expressed the great truth, that to a man of courage, the most terrible object is the person he has injured, in the following address to Banquo's ghost!

MACBETH.

What man dare, I dare.

Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,

The arm'd rhinoceros, or Hyrcan tyger :

Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves

Shall never tremble : or, be alive again,

And dare me to the desert with thy sword ;

If trembling I evade it, then protest me

The baby of a girl. Hence, terrible shadow !

Unreal mock'ry, hence !

It is impossible not to sympathize with the
terrors

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH. 175

terrors Macbeth expresses in his disordered speech :

MACBETH.

It will have blood.—They say, blood will have blood.
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak ;
Augurs, that understand relations, have,
By magpies, and by choughs, and rooks, brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.

The perturbation, with which Macbeth again resorts to the Witches, and the tone of resentment and abhorrence with which he addresses them, rather expresses his sense of the crimes, to which their promises excited him, than any satisfaction in the regal condition, those crimes had procured.

MACBETH.

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags !
What is't you do ?

The unhappy and disconsolate state of the most triumphant villainy, from a consciousness of men's internal detestation of that flagitious greatness, to which they are forced to pay external homage, is finely expressed in the following words :

MACBETH.

MACBETH.

I have liv'd long enough : my way of life
 Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf :
 And that which should accompany old age,
 As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
 I must not look to have ; but in their stead,
 Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
 Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

Toward the conclusion of the piece, his mind seems to sink under its load of guilt ; despair and melancholy hang on his words. By his address to the physician, we perceive he has griefs that press harder on him than his enemies :

MACBETH.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd ;
 Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ;
 Raze out the written troubles of the brain ;
 And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
 Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
 Which weighs upon the heart ?

The alacrity with which he attacks young Siward, and his reluctance to engage with Macduff, of whose blood he says he has already

ready

ready had too much, complete a character uniformly preserved from the opening of the fable, to its conclusion.—We find him ever answering to the first idea we were made to conceive of him.

The man of honour pierces through the traitor and the assassin. His mind loses its tranquillity by guilt, but never its fortitude in danger. His crimes presented to him, even in the unreal mockery of a vision, or the harmless form of sleeping innocence, terrify him more than all his foes in arms. —It has been very justly observed by a late commentator, that this piece does not abound with those nice discriminations of character, usual in the plays of our Author, the events being too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions. It appears to me, that the character of Macbeth is also represented less particular and special, that his example may be of more universal utility. He has therefore placed him on that line, on which the major part of mankind may be ranked, just between the extremes of good and bad; a station assailable by various

N

tempta-

temptations, and standing in need of the guard of cautionary admonition. The supernatural agents, in some measure, take off our attention from the other characters, especially as they are, throughout the piece, what they have a right to be, predominant in the events. They should not interfere, but to weave the fatal web, or to unravel it; they ought ever to be the regents of the fable and artificers of the catastrophe, as the Witches are in this piece. To preserve in Macbeth a just consistency of character; to make that character naturally susceptible of those desires, that were to be communicated to it; to render it interesting to the spectator, by some amiable qualities; to make it exemplify the dangers of ambition, and the terrors of remorse; was all that could be required of the tragedian and the moralist. With all the powers of poetry he elevates a legendary tale, without carrying it beyond the limits of vulgar faith and tradition. The solemn character of the infernal rites would be very striking, if the scene was not made ludicrous by a mob of old women, which the players have added to
the

the three weird sisters.—The incantation is so consonant with the doctrine of enchantments, and receives such power by the help of those potent ministers of direful superstition, the Terrible and the Mysterious, that it has not the air of poetical fiction so much as of a discovery of magical secrets; and thus it seizes the heart of the ignorant, and communicates an irresistible horror to the imagination even of the more informed spectator.

Shakspeare was too well read in human nature, not to know, that though Reason may expel the superstitions of the nursery, the imagination does not so entirely free itself from their dominion, as not to re-admit them, if occasion presents them, in the very shape in which they were once revered. The first scene in which the Witches appear, is not so happily executed as the others. He has too exactly followed the vulgar reports of the Lapland witches, of whom our sailors used to imagine they could purchase a fair wind.

The choice of a story that at once gave countenance to King James's doctrine of dæmonology, and shewed the ancient destination of his family to the throne of Great Britain, was no less flattering to that monarch than Virgil's to Augustus and the Roman people, in making Anchises shew to Æneas the representations of unborn heroes, that were to adorn his line, and augment the glory of their commonwealth. It is reported, that a great French wit often laughs at the tragedy of Macbeth, for having a legion of ghosts in it. One would imagine he either had not learnt English, or had forgotten his Latin; for the Spirits of Banquo's line are no more ghosts, than the representations of the Julian race in the Æneid; and there is no ghost but Banquo's in the whole play. Euripides, in the most philosophic and polite age of the Athenians, brings the shade of Polydorus, Priam's son, upon the stage, to tell a very long and lamentable tale. Here is therefore produced, by each tragedian, the departed spirit walking this upper world for causes admitted by popular faith. Among the
Ancients,

Ancients, the unburied, and with us, the murdered, were supposed to do so. The apparitions are therefore equally justifiable or blameable; so the laurel must be adjudged to that poet who throws most of the sublime and the marvellous into the supernatural agent; best preserves the credibility of its intervention, and renders it most useful in the drama. There surely can be no dispute of the superiority of our countryman in these articles. There are many bombast speeches in the Tragedy of Macbeth; and these are the lawful prize of the critic; but envy, not content to nibble at faults, strikes at its true object, the prime excellencies and perfections of the thing it would depreciate. One should not wonder if a school-boy critic, who neither knows what were the superstitions of former times, or the poet's privileges in all times, should flourish away, with all *the rash dexterity of wit*, upon the appearance of a ghost; but it is strange, a man of universal learning, a real and just connoisseur, and a true genius, should cite as improper and absurd, what has been practised by the most celebrated artists in
the

the dramatic way, when such machinery was authorized by the belief of the people. Is there not reason to suspect from such uncandid treatment of our Poet by this critic, that he

Views him with jealous, yet with scornful eyes,
And hates for arts that caus'd himself to rise?

The difference between a mind naturally prone to evil, and a frail one warped by the violence of temptations, is delicately distinguished in Macbeth and his wife. There are also some touches of the pencil, that mark the male and female character. When they deliberate on the murder of the King, the duties of host and subject strongly plead with him against the deed. She passes over these considerations ; goes to Duncan's chamber resolved to kill him, but could not do it, because, she says, he resembled her father while he slept. There is something feminine in this, and perfectly agreeable to the nature of the sex ; who, even when void of principle, are seldom entirely divested of sentiment ; and thus the poet, who, to use
3 his

his own phrase, had overstepped the modesty of nature in the exaggerated fierceness of her character, returns back to the line and limits of humanity, and that very judiciously, by a sudden impression, which has only an instantaneous effect. Thus she may relapse into her former wickedness, and, from the same susceptibility, by the force of other impressions, be afterwards driven to distraction. As her character was not composed of those gentle elements out of which regular repentance could be formed, it was well judged to throw her mind into the chaos of madness; and, as she had exhibited wickedness in its highest degree of ferocity and atrociousness, she should be an example of the wildest agonies of remorse. As Shakspeare could most exactly delineate the human mind, in its regular state of reason, so no one ever so happily caught its varying forms, in the wanderings of delirium.

The scene in which Macduff is informed of the murder of his wife and children, is so celebrated, that it is not necessary to enlarge upon its merit. We feel there, how
much

much a just imitation of natural sentiments, on such a tender occasion, is more pathetic, than chosen terms and studied phrases. As, in the foregoing chapter, I have made some observations on our Author's management of the Præternatural Beings, I forbear to enlarge further on the subject of the Witches: that he has kept closely to the traditions concerning them, is very fully set forth, in the notes of a learned commentator on his works.

This piece may certainly be deemed one of the best of Shakspeare's compositions: and though it contains some faulty speeches, and one whole scene entirely absurd and improper, which art might have corrected or lopped away; yet genius, powerful genius only, (*wild nature's vigour working at the root!*) could have produced such strong and original beauties, and adapted both to the general temper and taste of the age in which it appeared.

UPON THE

C I N N A

OF

CORNEILLE.

THE
HISTORY
OF
THE
CORNWALL
SHIRE
FROM
THE
EARLIEST
TO
THE
PRESENT
TIMES
BY
J. H. COLEMAN
ESQ.
OF
TRURO

CORNWALL
SHIRE
FROM
THE
EARLIEST
TO
THE
PRESENT
TIMES
BY
J. H. COLEMAN
ESQ.
OF
TRURO

UPON THE
C I N N A
OF
C O R N E I L L E.

THOUGH it is an agreeable task, upon the whole, to attempt the vindication of an author's injured fame, the pleasure is much allayed, by its being attended with a necessity to lay open the unfairness and errors, in the proceedings of his antagonist. To defend is pleasant, to accuse is painful; but we must prove the injustice of the aggressor's sentence, before we can demand to have it repealed. The editor of the late edition of Corneille's works, has given the following preface to the tragedy of Cinna:
“ Having often heard Corneille and Shak-
“ speare compared, I thought it proper to
“ shew their different manner, in subjects
“ that have a resemblance. I have therefore
chosen

“ chosen the first acts of the Death of Cæ-
 “ sar, where there is a conspiracy, as in
 “ Cinna ; and in which every thing is re-
 “ lative to the conspiracy to the end of the
 “ third act. The reader may compare the
 “ thoughts, the style, and the judgment of
 “ Shakspeare, with the thoughts, the style,
 “ and the judgment of Corneille. It be-
 “ longs to the readers of all nations to pro-
 “ nounce between the one and the other.
 “ A Frenchman or an Englishman might
 “ perhaps be suspected of some partiality.
 “ To institute this process, it was necessary
 “ to make an exact translation : what was
 “ prose in the tragedy of Shakspeare, is ren-
 “ dered into prose ; what was in blank-
 “ verse, into blank-verse, and almost verse
 “ by verse ; what is low and familiar, is
 “ translated familiarly and in a low style.
 “ The translator has endeavoured to rise
 “ with the Author when he rises ; and when
 “ he is turgid and bombast, not to be
 “ more or less so than he. The translation
 “ given here is the most faithful that can
 “ be, and the only faithful one in our lan-
 “ guage, of any author ancient or modern.

“ I have but a word to add, which is,
 “ that blank-verse costs nothing but the
 “ trouble of dictating: it is not more dif-
 “ ficult to write, than a letter. If people
 “ should take it into their heads to write
 “ tragedies in blank-verse, and to act them
 “ on our theatre, tragedy is ruined: take
 “ away the difficulty, and you take away
 “ the merit.”

An English reader will hardly forbear smiling at this bold assertion concerning the facility of writing blank-verse. It is indeed no hard matter to write bad verse of any kind; but as so few of our poets have attained to that perfection in it, which Shakspeare and Milton have, we have reason to suppose the art to be difficult. Whatever is well done, in poetry or eloquence, appears easy to be done. In the theatrical dialogue, which is an imitation of discourse, our critics require the language of nature, and a just resemblance of the thing imitated, without the appearance of effort and labour. Possibly there is as much of difficulty in blank-verse to the poet, as there

there appears of ease in it to the reader. Like the cestus of Venus, formed by the happy skill of the Graces, it best exerts its charms, while the artifice of the texture is partly concealed. Dryden, who brought the art of rhyme to great excellence, endeavoured to introduce it on our stage; but nature and taste revolted against an imitation of dialogue, so entirely different from that, in which men discourse. The verse, Mr. de Voltaire thus condemns, is perhaps not less happily adapted, than the iambic, to the dramatic offices. It rises gracefully into the sublime; it can slide happily into the familiar; hasten its career if impelled by vehemence of passion; pause in the hesitation of doubt; appear lingering and languid, in dejection and sorrow; is capable of varying its accent, and adapting its harmony, to the sentiment it should convey, and the passion it would excite, with all the power of musical expression. Even a person, who did not understand our language, would find himself very differently affected, by the following speeches in that metre:

LEAR.

UPON THE CINNA OF CORNEILLE. 191

LEAR.

Vengeance ! plague ! death ! confusion !..

Fiery ? what fiery quality ? why, Glo'ster,

I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall, and his wife :

The king would speak with Cornwall. The dear father

Would with his daughter speak, commands her service :

Are they inform'd of this ? my breath and blood !

Fiery ? the fiery duke ? tell the hot duke that—

MACBETH.

I have lived long enough : my way of life

Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf ;

And that which should accompany old age,

As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have ; but in their stead,

Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,

Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dares not.

The charm arising from the tones of English blank-verse cannot be felt by a foreigner, who is so far from being acquainted with the pronunciation of our language, that he often mistakes the signification of the most common words ; of which there are many remarkable instances in this boasted translation of Julius Cæsar ; for Mr.
de

de Voltaire does not know, for example, that the word *course* signifies method of proceeding, but imagines it means a course of dishes, or a race. Brutus replies to Cassius's proposal to kill Cæsar:

BRUTUS.

Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
To cut the head off, and then hack the limbs;
Like wrath in death, and envy afterwards:
For Antony is but a limb of Cæsar.

Thus it is translated by Mr. de Voltaire:

BRUTUS.

Cette course aux Romains paraîtrait trop sanglante;
On nous reprocherait la colère & l'envie,
Si nous coupons la tête, & puis hachons les membres,
Car Antoine n'est rien qu'un membre de César.

The following ingenious note is added by the translator. "The word *course*," says he, "perhaps has an allusion to the Lupercal course. It also signifies a service of dishes at table."—It is very extraordinary, that a man should set up for a translator, with so little

little acquaintance in the language, as not to be able to distinguish whether a word, in a certain period, signifies a race, a service of dishes, or a mode of conduct. In a piece intitled *Guillaume de Vadè*, and attributed to Mr. de Voltaire, there is a blunder of the same kind. Polonius orders his daughter not to confide in the promises of Hamlet, who being heir to the crown, cannot have liberty of choice in marriage, like a private person. He must not, says the old statesman, carve for himself, as vulgar persons do. The French author translates it, "he must not cut his own victuals;" and runs on about morsels, as if Hamlet's dinner, not his marriage, had been the subject of debate. The translator knew not that the word *carve* is often used metaphorically in our language, for a person's framing or fashioning his lot or portion. We say, the lover feeds on hope, the warrior thirsts for glory: would it be fair to translate, that the lover eats a morsel of hope, and the warrior desires to drink a draught of glory? If such translations are allowed, the works of the most correct au-

O

thor

thor may be rendered ridiculous. It is apparent, that Mr. de Voltaire depended entirely on the assistance of a dictionary, to enable him *to give the most faithful translation that can be, and the only faithful one, in the French language, of any author, ancient or modern.*

It is necessary to present to those readers, who do not understand French, the miserable mistakes and galimatias of this dictionary work. Brutus, in his soliloquy, meditating on what Cassius had been urging concerning Cæsar, thus expresses his apprehension, that imperial power may change the conduct of the man.

BRUTUS.

'Tis a common proof,
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Cæsar may.

Thus Mr. Voltaire translates it:

BRUTUS.

BRUTUS.

—On sait assez quelle est l'ambition.

L'échelle des grandeurs à ses yeux se présente ;

Elle y monte en cachant son front aux spectateurs ;

Et quand elle est haut, alors elle se montre ;

Alors jusques au ciel élevant ses regards,

D'un coup d'œil méprisant sa vanité dédaigne

Les premiers échelons qui firent sa grandeur.

C'est ce que peut César.

“One knows what ambition is: the ladder of grandeurs presents itself to her; in going up she hides her face from the spectators; when she is at the top, then she shews herself; then raising her view to the heavens, with a scornful look her vanity disdains the steps of the ladder that made her greatness. This it is that Cæsar may do.”

In the original, lowliness is young ambition's ladder: the man who by feigned humility and courtesy, has attained the power to which he aspired, turns his back on those humble means by which he ascended to it; the metaphor agreeing both to the man, who has gained the top of the ladder, or to him

who has risen to the summit of power. In the translation, ambition ascends by steps of grandeurs, hiding her face from the spectators; when she is at the top, with a look or glance of her eye her vanity disdains the first steps she took; which steps, observe, were grandeurs; so the allegory is vanity and ambition disdaining grandeur; and the image presented is a woman climbing up a ladder, which is not a very common object, but more so than vanity's disdaining grandeurs.

I am sorry the translator had not a better English dictionary, for on that, not on his own knowledge of our tongue, it is plain he depended. In another instance it misleads him. After Portia had importuned Brutus to communicate to her the secret cause of his perturbation, he says to her;

BRUTUS.

Portia, go in a while,
And, by-and-by, thy bosom shall partake
The secrets of my heart,
All my engagements I will construe to thee,

All

All the charactery of my sad brows.——

Leave me with haste.

The dictionary was consulted for the word construe; and thus, according to the usual form, one may suppose it to have stood: To construe, to interpret. This not serving the purpose, to interpret was next sought; there he finds, to interpret or to explain; again, with indefatigable industry, excited by a desire to excel all translators and translations, he has recourse to the article *to explain*; under this head he finds, to unfold or clear up; so away goes the translator to clear up the countenance of Brutus:

Va, mes sourcils froncés prennent un air plus doux.

“Go;” says he; “my frowning brow shall take a softer air.”

There are so many gross blunders in this work, that it would be tedious to point them out; but it is to be hoped, they will deter other beaux esprits from attempting to hurt works of genius, by the masked battery of an

an unfair translation. Mr. Voltaire desires, that by his translation all Europe will compare the thoughts, the style, and the judgment of Shakspeare, with the thoughts, the style, and the judgment of Corneille. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to make the graces of style pass from one language to another; and our blank-verse cannot be equalled by French blank-verse. The thoughts might in some measure have been given, if the translator had understood the words, in which Shakspeare hath expressed them. Upon the judgment of both the authors in the choice of the story, in the conduct of it, in exciting the sympathies belonging to it, in the fashioning of the characters, in the nobleness of sentiment, and the representation of Roman manners, we shall upon close examination of the Cinna and Julius Cæsar be able to pronounce.

As the subject of the drama is built on a conspiracy, which every one knows had not any effect, and as the author has so conducted it as to render the pardon Augustus gives the conspirators, an act of political prudnece

prudence rather than of generous clemency, there is not any thing to interest us, but the characters of Cinna, Emilia, and Maximus. Let us examine how far they are worthy to do so, as set forth in this piece ; for we have no historical acquaintance with them. Emilia is the daughter of Toranius, the tutor of Augustus, who was proscribed by him in his triumvirate. As we have not any knowledge of this Toranius, we are no more concerned about any cruelty committed upon him, than upon any other man ; so that we are not prepared to enter into the outrageous resentment of Emilia ; especially as we see her, in the court of Augustus, under the sacred relation of his adopted daughter, enjoying all the privileges of that distinguished situation, and treated with the tenderness of paternal love. Nothing so much deforms the feminine character, as ferocity of sentiment. Nothing so deeply stains the human character, as ingratitude.

This lady, however odious she appears to the spectator, is made to engage Cinna her lover, a nephew of the great Pompey, in a
conspiracy

conspiracy against Augustus. Shakspeare most judiciously laboured to shew, that Brutus's motives to kill Cæsar were perfectly generous, and purely public-spirited. Corneille has not kindled Cinna to his enterprise, with any spark of Roman fire. In every thing he appears treacherous, base, and timid. Maximus, the other conspirator, seems at first a better character; but in the third act he makes a most lamentable confession to a slave, of his love for Emilia, and his jealousy of Cinna: this slave gives such advice as one might expect from such a counsellor; he urges him to betray his associates, and, by means of a lie, to prevail upon Emilia to go off with him. Thus Maximus becomes as treacherous and base as Cinna his friend, and Emilia his mistress. The poet follows Seneca's account of this affair, in making Livia (who has no other business in the drama) advise Augustus to try the effects of clemency, as his punishment of former conspiracies excited new ones. Augustus tells her she talks like a woman, treats her counsel with scorn, and then follows it. Augustus appears with
dignity

dignity and sense in the other scene, and is the only person in the play, for whom one has any respect. This is the plan of a work which is to prove Corneille's genius and judgment superior to Shakspeare's. As Mr. Voltaire has given his translation of Julius Cæsar, I will just present to the reader a literal translation of the first scene of the first act, which begins by a soliloquy.

CINNA, TRAGÉDIE.

ACTE PREMIER. SCENE PREMIERE.

EMILIE.

Impatiens désirs d'une illustre vengeance,
 Dont la mort de mon père a formé la naissance,
 Enfants impétueux de mon ressentiment,
 Que ma douleur séduite embrasse aveuglement,
 Vous prenez sur mon ame un trop puissant empire :
 Durant quelques momens souffrez que je respire,
 Et que je considère, en l'état où je suis,
 Et ce que je hazarde, & ce que je poursuis.
 Quand je regarde Auguste au milieu de sa gloire,
 Et que vous reprochez à ma triste mémoire
 Que par sa propre main mon père massacré
 Du trône où je le vois fait le premier degré ;

Quand

202 UPON THE CINNA OF CORNEILLE.

Quand vous me présentez cette sanglante image,
 La cause de ma haine, & l'effet de sa rage,
 Je m'abandonne toute à vos ardens transports,
 Et crois pour une mort lui devoir mille morts.
 Au milieu toutefois d'une fureur si juste,
 J'aime encor plus Cinna que je ne hais Auguste ;
 Et je sens refroidir ce bouillant mouvement,
 Quand il faut pour le suivre exposer mon amant
 Oui, Cinna, contre moi moi-même je m'irrite,
 Quand je songe aux dangers où je te précipite.
 Quoique pour me servir tu n'apprehendes rien,
 Te demander du sang, c'est exposer le tien.
 D'une si haute place on n'abat point de têtes,
 Sans attirer sur soi mille & mille tempêtes.
 L'issue en est douteuse, & le péril certain :
 Un ami déloyal peut trahir ton dessein ;
 L'ordre mal concerté, l'occasion mal prise,
 Peuvent sur son auteur renverser l'entreprise,
 Tourner sur toi les coups dont tu le veux frapper
 Dans sa ruine même il peut t'envelopper ;
 Et quoiqu'en ma faveur ton amour exécute,
 Il te peut en tombant écraser sous sa chute.
 Ah ! cesse de courir à ce mortel danger :
 Te perdre en me vengeant ce n'est pas me venger.
 Un cœur est trop cruel quand il trouve des charmes
 Aux douceurs que corrompt l'amertume des larmes ;

Et l'on doit mettre au rang des plus cuisans malheurs
La mort d'un ennemi qui coute tant de pleurs.

Mais peut-on en verser alors qu'on venge un père ?
Est-il perte à ce prix qui ne semble légère ?
Et quand son assassin tombe sous notre effort,
Doit-on considérer ce que coûte sa mort ?
Cessez, vaines frayeurs, cessez, lâches tendresses,
De jeter dans mon cœur vos indignes faiblesses :
Et toi qui les produis par tes soins superflus,
Amour, sers mon devoir, & ne le combats plus.
Lui céder c'est ta gloire, & le vaincre ta honte ;
Montre-toi généreux, souffrant qu'il te surmonte.
Plus tu lui donneras, plus il te va donner,
Et ne triomphera que pour te couronner.

I do not pretend, as Mr. Voltaire does, to make the reader a judge of the style of Corneille by my translation ; he must allow for the want of versification, and be content with the thoughts, the sentiments, the conceits of the original.

EMILIA.

“ Impatient desires of an illustrious vengeance, to which the death of my father gave birth, impetuous children of my resentment,

ment, which my deluded sorrow embraces too blindly, you assume too great an empire over my mind. Suffer me to breathe a moment, and let me consider the state I am in, what I hazard, and what I would attempt. When I behold Cæsar in the midst of glory, you (I suppose this means, you the impetuous children of the impatient desires of an illustrious vengeance) reproach my melancholy memory, that my father, massacred by his hand, was the first step to the throne on which I see him. And when you present me that bloody image, the cause of my hatred, the effect of his rage, I abandon myself to your violent transports, and think that for one death I owe him a thousand deaths. In the midst of so just an indignation I still love Cinna more than I hate Augustus; and I find this boiling anger cool, when to obey it, I must hazard my lover. Yes, Cinna, against myself, myself am angry, when I think of the dangers into which I precipitate thee. Though to serve me thou fearest nothing, to ask thee for blood is to expose thine. One beats not down heads from so high a place, without drawing upon
one's

one's self a thousand and a thousand storms ; the issue is doubtful, the peril is certain. The order ill concerted, the opportunity ill chosen, may on their author overturn the whole enterprise, turn on thee the blow thou wouldst strike, and even envelope thee in his ruin ; and what thou executest for my sake, may crush thee in its fall. Ah ! do not run into this danger. To ruin yourself, in revenging me, is not to revenge me. That heart is too cruel which finds a sweetness in that vengeance, which is corrupted by the bitterness of sorrow : and one should put in the rank of the greatest misfortunes, the death of an enemy, which costs so many tears. But can one shed tears when one revenges a father ? Is there a loss which does not seem light at that price ? And when his assassin dies by our means, ought we to consider what his death costs us ? Cease, vain fears, cease, foolish tenderness, to affect my heart with your unworthy weaknesses : and thou who producest them by thy superfluous anxieties, O love, assist my duty, do not combat with it ; to yield to it is thy glory, to vanquish it thy disgrace ; shew thy self generous,

rous, suffer it to overcome thee. The more thou givest to it, the more it will give thee, and will triumph only to crown thee."

Such mighty nothings in so strange a style
Amaze th' unlearn'd, and make the learned smile.

The second scene of Emilia, and Fulvia her friend, is not so absurd as the soliloquy; but the answer Emilia gives to Fulvia, who urges to her, that the benefits she has received from Augustus, and the credit she has with him should mitigate her resentment, shews her disposition to be ungrateful, violent, and treacherous.

EMILIE.

Les bienfaits ne font pas toûjours ce que tu penses ;
D'une main odieuse ils tiennent lieu d'offenses :
Plus nous en prodiguons à qui nous peut haïr,
Plus d'armes nous donnons à qui nous veut trahir.
Il m'en fait chaque jour sans changer mon courage.
Je suis ce que j'étais, & je puis davantage ;
Et des mêmes présens qu'il verse dans mes mains
J'achette contre lui les esprits des Romains.
Je recevrais de lui la place de Livie,
Comme un moyen plus sûr d'attenter à sa vie.

“ Benefits

“ Benefits do not always do what you think. From an odious hand they are so many offences ; the more we bestow upon those who hate us, the more arms we furnish to those who may betray us. He bestows them upon me every day, without changing my resolution. I am what I was, and I am able to effect more ; and with the presents he pours into my hands, I purchase the hearts of Romans to set them against him. I would receive from him the place of Livia, to obtain surer means to attempt his life.”

The next scene, Cinna enters, and tells his furious charmer, that the conspirators enter into the plot with as much zeal as if they too were serving a mistress.

CINNA.

Tous s’y montrent portés avec tant d’allégresse,
 Qu’ils semblent comme moi servir une maîtresse.—
 Plût aux dieux que vous-même eussiez vû de quel zèle
 Cette troupe entreprend une action si belle !
 Au seul nom de César, d’Auguste, d’Empereur,
 Vous eussiez vû leurs yeux s’enflammer de fureur ;
 Et dans un même instant, par un effet contraire,
 Leur front pâlir d’horreur, & rougir de colère.

Here

Here is a childish play upon words, and a mere rant: for, in those times, neither the names of Cæsar, Augustus, or Emperor, were detested. It was by the monsters, who afterwards assumed them, that they were rendered odious.

The scene is very long, as we may suppose, where such different sentiments and passions are to be expressed, as those which belong to the lover and conspirator. Cinna assures Emilia that he had concealed from his associates, that to avenge her father and to obtain her were the motives from which he had entered into this conspiracy :

Rien n'est pour vous à craindre ; aucun de nos amis
Ne sait ni vos desseins, ni ce qui m'est promis :
Et leur parlant tantôt des misérables Romaines,
Je leur ai tû la mort qui fait naître nos haines,
De peur que mon ardeur touchant vos intérêts
D'un si parfait amour ne trahît les secrets.

“ There is nothing for you to fear ; none of our friends know the designs, nor what is promised me. In speaking of the miseries of

of the Romans, I was silent about the death which is the cause of our hatred, lest my warmth for your interests should betray the secrets of such a perfect love."

There was not only discretion, but good sense in this, for the *secrets d'un parfait amour* might not have been duly attended to, or properly revered, by a surly band of conspirators met to concert measures for such a perilous enterprise. In the next scene, Augustus sends for Cinna and Maximus, to advise with them, whether he shall restore liberty to the commonwealth. Here we have some respite from the strange medley of tender love and dire revenge, and in lieu of it, a long political discussion of the conveniences and inconveniences of different modes of government.

Corneille has borrowed from Dion Cassius, and transferred to Cinna and Maximus, the speeches of Agrippa and Mecaenas, when Augustus consulted them, whether he should demit his power, and live a private man, as Sylla had done. Mr. Fenelon has

P

very

very justly censured, as ill suiting that simplicity of style and manner, with which Augustus expressed himself, the following lines :

AUGUSTE.

Cet empire absolu sur la terre et sur l'onde,
 Ce pouvoir souverain que j'ai sur tout le monde,
 Cette grandeur sans bornes, et cet illustre rang,
 Qui m'a jadis coûté tant de peine et de sang,
 Enfin tout ce qu'adore en ma haute fortune
 D'un courtisan flatteur la présence importune,
 N'est que de ces beautés dont l'éclat éblouit,
 Et qu'on cesse d'aimer si-tôt qu'on en jouit.

“ This absolute empire over the earth and ocean, this sovereign power that I have over the whole world, this greatness without limits, and this illustrious rank which has heretofore cost me so much labour and so much blood ; in fine, all that the troublesome crowd of flattering courtiers adores in my high fortune, is but a piece of pageantry whose lustre dazzles, and that one ceases to admire as soon as one possesses it.”

Such ostentatious expressions are perfectly
 ly

ly ridiculous to those, who are acquainted with the character of the speaker : but there is another fault much more detrimental to the drama ; which is, the aversion we conceive at the black treachery of Cinna, who, when Augustus consults him as his friend, whether he shall lay down his power and restore liberty to the commonwealth, advises him not to do it, with a great appearance of personal attachment to him, and zeal for his country ; but in reality, that he may not lose a pretence to sacrifice him to the revenge of Emilia. This holds forth Cinna to the spectator as a perfidious friend, a wicked counsellor, a profligate citizen. A more atrocious conduct was perhaps never ascribed to any character on the stage, where the guilty person was intended to excite indignation and abhorrence ; and is therefore the most flagrantly absurd, in a case where the character is that on which the interest of the play is to turn.

Augustus having intimated to Cinna, at the conclusion of their conference, that he was willing to give Emilia to him, he be-

gins then to reflect upon his perfidy, and urges to Maximus the remorse he feels for the intended assassination. The poet seems to be afraid he has not yet sufficiently disgraced his hero, and therefore makes Maximus reply to him thus :

MAXIME.

Formez vos remors d'une plus juste cause,
De vos lâches conseils, qui seuls ont arrêté
Le bonheur renaissant de notre liberté.
C'est vous seul aujourd'hui qui nous l'avez ôtée,
De la main de César Brute l'eut acceptée,
Et n'eut jamais souffert qu'un intérêt léger
De vengeance ou d'amour l'eût remise en danger.

“Derive your remorse from a juster cause, from your base counsels, which alone put a stop to the felicity of reviving liberty. 'Tis you alone that have now deprived us of it. From the hand of Cæsar, Brutus would have accepted the liberty of Rome; and never, from a paltry interest of love or revenge, would have again put it to hazard.”

As every movement in this play is to turn
on

on mean and selfish passions ; as soon as Maximus apprehends his rival is to receive Emilia as the reward of his enterprise, he suffers his slave to betray the plot to Augustus. He then endeavours to persuade Emilia to escape with him. All this is very awkwardly conducted.

It is strange that a dramatic writer should not have studied human nature enough to perceive, that the only character which cannot interest upon the stage, is that which is mean, low, and contemptible. Great spirits, though of a bad kind, engage our attention to all their operations, because they are capable of producing great events. We are curious to see, what the audacious villain will dare to do, what the cunning one will contrive: but when a man is presented to us as a scoundrel, *un lâche*, we disdain to attend to his actions. However well therefore the great scenes of this play may be written, considered singly, they are very injudiciously managed. We shall now see Cinna appear so despicable, that to punish him would be below the dignity of Augustus ;

tus ; and to retain him as a friend, unworthy of any man. Augustus, informed by the double traitor Maximus, sends for Cinna, and reproaches him with every species of base ingratitude ; tells him he first gave him his life, enriched him with the spoils of Antony ; upon every occasion had been profusely liberal and kind to him ; preferred his interest even to those, who had fought for him, and by whose blood he had purchased the empire ; and had admitted him, upon the death of Mécænas, into the first place in his confidence. Augustus adds too, that it was by his advice he retained his power ; and after all this, says he, you would assassinate me. Cinna does not barely deny the conspiracy, but exclaims, “ I, sir, have I such a treacherous soul, such a base design !”

Augustus cuts him short in this disgraceful lie, shewing him he has full information of the plot ; and very justly says, “ The liberty of thy country could not be thy object, for then thou wouldst not have hindered my restoring it. Thou must design therefore to reign in my place. Alas ! Rome must be
unhappy

unhappy indeed, if I were the only obstacle, and that after my death it should not fall into better hands than thine. Learn to know what thou art : descend into thyself : thou art honoured, praised, and loved, all tremble before thee, so high have I raised thy fortune : but thou wouldst be the pity of those who now envy that fortune, if I abandoned thee to thy own little merit. Contradict me if thou canst ; tell me what is thy merit, what are thy virtues, what are thy glorious exploits, what are those rare qualities, by which thou couldst pretend to my favour, what is it raises thee above the vulgar ? My favour is thy only glory ; thy power arises from it ; that alone raises and supports thee ; it is that, not thou, which is respected : thou hast neither rank nor credit, but what arises from it ; and to let thee fall, I need only draw back the hand that supports thee."

Quel était ton dessein, et que prétendais-tu,
Après m'avoir au temple à tes pieds abattu ?
Affranchir ton pays d'un pouvoir monarchique ?
Si j'ai bien entendu tantôt ta politique,

Son

Son salut désormais dépend d'un souverain,
 Qui pour tout conserver tienne tout en sa main ;
 Et si sa liberté te faisait entreprendre,
 Tu ne m'eusses jamais empêché de la rendre ;
 Tu l'aurais acceptée au nom de tout l'état,
 Sans vouloir l'acquérir par un assassinat.
 Quel était donc ton but ? d'y regner en ma place ?
 D'un étrange malheur son destin le menace,
 Si pour monter au trône et lui donner la loi,
 Tu ne trouves dans Rome autre obstacle que moi ;
 Si jusques à ce point son sort est déplorable,
 Que tu sois après moi le plus considérable ;
 Et que ce grand fardeau de l'empire Romain
 Ne puisse après ma mort tomber mieux qu'en ta main.
 Apprens à te connaître, et descends en toi-même.
 On t'honore dans Rome, on te courtise, on t'aime ;
 Chacun tremble sous toi, chacun t'offre des vœux ;
 Ta fortune est bien haut, tu peux ce que je veux ;
 Mais tu ferais pitié, même à ceux qu'elle irrite,
 Si je t'abandonnais à ton peu de mérite.
 Ose me démentir, dis-moi ce que tu vaux,
 Conte moi tes vertus, tes glorieux travaux,
 Les rares qualités par où tu m'as dû plaire,
 Et tout ce qui t'élève au-dessus du vulgaire.
 Ma faveur fait ta gloire, & ton pouvoir en vien ;
 Elle seule t'élève, & seule te soutient,

C'es

C'est elle qu'on adore, et non pas ta personne,
 Tu n'as crédit ni rang qu'autant qu'elle t'en donne ;
 Et pour te faire choir je n'aurais aujourd'hui
 Qu' à retirer la main qui seule est ton appui.

Emilia enters, and behaves with the most insolent pride, undaunted assurance, and unfeeling ingratitude ; and declares to Augustus, that so long as she is handsome enough to get lovers, she shall never want enemies. Augustus still adheres to his plan of clemency, (for that too is plan, and the result of prudent deliberation, not of generous magnanimity;) he pardons Maximus, forgives Cinna in spite of his unworthiness, and bestows upon him Emilia and the consulship. Emilia is at last mitigated, and modestly tells Augustus, that heaven has ordained a change in the commonwealth, since it has changed her heart. What is there in all this that can move either pity or terror ? In what is it moral, in what is it interesting, where is it pathetic ?

It is a common error, in the plan of Corneille's tragedies, that the interest of the
 piece

piece turns upon some unknown person, generally a haughty princess; so that instead of the representation of an important event, and the characters of illustrious persons, the business of the drama is the love-intrigue of a termagant lady, who, if she is a Roman, insults the Barbarians, if she is a Barbarian, braves the Romans; and even to her lover is insolent and fierce. Were such a person to be produced on our theatre, she would be taken for a mad poetess escaped from her keepers in Bedlam, who, fancying herself a queen, was ranting, and delivering her mandates in rhyme upon the stage. All the excuse that can be made for Corneille in such representations is, that characters like these, dignified indeed with nobler sentiments, were admired in the romances, where the manners of chivalry are exaggerated. By the insitutions of chivalry, every valiant knight professed a peculiar devotion to the fair sex, in whose cause, as the champion of the defenceless, and protector of the oppressed, he was always ready to take arms. A lady's interest being often the object, and sometimes her person the prize

of a combat, she was supposed to inspire his courage; and, as he was to be not less distinguished for politeness than valour, he affected an air of submissive obedience, while she, by the courtesy of knighthood, was allowed to assume a style of superiority and command. To carry these manners into ancient Greece and Rome, and weave them into a conspiracy there, betrays want of judgment. This drama is carried on in the strain of romance. The lady enjoins her lover to kill Augustus: that adventure achieved, he is to hope for her hand; his glory is to be derived from her acknowledging him worthy of it; she is continually exhorting him to deserve the honour of being beloved by her. The fate of Augustus, of the Roman empire, all the duties of the citizen and the friend, are to depend on her decision. She says to Augustus, when he has discovered the conspiracy, as a sufficient vindication of her lover,

Qui, tout ce qu'il a fait, il l'a fait pour me plaire,
Et j'en étois, seigneur, la cause et le salaire.

The author certainly intended to recommend

mend Cinna to his spectators merely as a *loyal lover*, according to the phrase of romance: in every other light he appears contemptible, and indeed suffers himself to be used with the greatest contempt and indignity. As Shakspeare laboured to shew that the motives of Brutus were untinctured by any bad passion; every movement in the mind of Cinna has on the contrary the character of baseness, and whether he conspires, or whether he repents of it, he is still, as he acknowledges himself to be,

Un esprit malheureux,
Qui ne forme qu'en lâche un dessein généreux.

From this unhappy wretch, who basely conceives a generous design, let us turn to Brutus. There we shall see the different judgment and genius of the artists. Brutus and Cinna are drawn in the same situation, conspiring against the foremost man of all this world: in the one we have the features and complexion of a villain, in the other the high-finished form of a noble patriot

UPON THE DEATH
OF
JULIUS CÆSAR.

UPON THE DEATH

JULIUS CAESAR

UPON THE DEATH
OF
JULIUS CÆSAR.

THE Tragedies of Cinna, and Julius Cæsar, are each of them the representation of a conspiracy ; but it cannot be denied that our countryman has been by far more judicious in his choice of the story. An abortive scheme, in which some people of obscure fame were engaged, and even in whom, as they are represented, the enterprise was pardoned, more from contempt of their abilities and power, than the clemency of the emperor, makes a poor figure in contrast with that conspiracy, which, formed by the first characters in Rome, effected the destruction of the greatest man the world ever produced, and was succeeded by the most memorable consequences. History furnishes various examples of men of base and treacherous natures, of dissolute manners, ruined fortunes, and lost reputations, uniting in horrid association to destroy their prince.

Ambition

Ambition often cuts itself a bloody way to greatness.—Exasperated misery sometimes plunges its desperate dagger in the breast of the oppressor. The cabal of a court, the mutiny of a camp, the wild zeal of fanatics, have too frequently produced events of that nature. But this conspiracy was formed of very different elements. It was the genius of Rome, the rights of her constitution, the spirit of her laws, that rose against the ambition of Cæsar; they steeled the heart, and whetted the dagger of the mild, the virtuous, the gentle Brutus, to give the mortal wound, not to a tyrant, who had fastened fetters on his fellow-citizens, but to the conqueror, who had made almost the whole world wear their chains; and who was then preparing to subdue the only empire that remained unsubjected to them.

Can there be a subject more worthy of the Tragic Muse, than an action so important in its consequences, and unparalleled in all its circumstances? How is our curiosity excited, to discover what could engage the man of virtue in an enterprise of such a

terrible kind; and why, after its accomplishment, instead of being stigmatized with the name of conspirator and assassin, the decrees of an august senate, and the voice of Rome, unite to place him one of the first on the roll of patriots; and the successor of the murdered Cæsar, who devoted to destruction the most illustrious men of Rome, durst not offer violation to the statue of Brutus!

To create, in the English spectator, the same reverence for him, it is necessary we should be made to imbibe those doctrines, and to adopt those opinions, by which he himself was actuated. We must be in the very capitol of Rome; stand at the base of Pompey's statue, surrounded by the effigies of their patriots; we must be taught to adore the images of Junius Brutus, the Horatii, Decii, Fabii, and all who had offered dear and bloody sacrifice to the liberty of their country, in order to see this action in the point of view in which it offered itself to the deliberation of Brutus, and in which it was beheld by those, who judged of it

Q

when

when done. To the very scene, to the very time, therefore, does our poet transport us : at Rome, we become Romans ; we are affected by their manners ; we are caught by their enthusiasm. But what a variety of imitations were there to be made by the artist to effect this ! and who but Shakspeare was capable of such a task ? A poet of ordinary genius would have endeavoured to interest us for Brutus, by the means of some imagined fond mother, or fonder mistress. But can a few female tears wipe out the stains of assassination ? A base conspirator, a vile assassin, like the wretched Cinna, of Corneille, would Brutus have appeared to us, if the same feeble arts only had been exerted for him. It is for the genuine son of ancient Rome, the lover of the liberty of his country, that we are interested. A concern for him, mixed with compassion for any other person, would only, from these discordant sentiments, have excited some painful emotions in the spectator. Indeed, the common aim of tragedy-writers seems to be merely to make us uneasy, for some reason or other, during the drama. They take any
thing

thing to be tragedy, in which there are great persons, and much lamentation ; but our poet never represents an action of one sort, and raises emotions and passions of another sort. He excites the sympathies, and the concern, proper to the story. The passion of love, or maternal affection, may afford good subjects for a tragedy. In the fables of Phædra and Merope, those sentiments belong to the action ; but they had no share in the resolution taken to kill Cæsar ; and, if they are made to interfere, they adulterate the imitation ; if to predominate, they spoil it. Our author disdains the legerdemain trick of substituting one passion for another. He is the great magician who can call forth passions of any sort. If they are such as time has destroyed, or custom extinguished, he summons from the dead those souls in which they once existed. Having sufficiently enlarged on the general scope of our author in this play, we will now consider it in the detail.

The first scene is in the streets of Rome. The Tribunes chide the people for gathering
Q 2 together

together to do honour to Cæsar's triumph. As certain decorums were unknown to the writers of Shakspeare's days, he suffers some poor mechanics to be too loquacious. As it was his business to depress the character of Cæsar, and render his victory over his illustrious rival as odious as possible, he judiciously makes one of the Tribunes thus address himself to the people :

MARULLUS.

Wherefore rejoice ? what conquest brings he home ?
What tributaries follow him to Rome,
To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels ?
You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things,
O you hard hearts ! you cruel men of Rome !
Knew you not Pompey ? Many a time and oft
Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The live-long day with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome ;
And when you saw his chariot but appear,
Have you not made an universal shout,
That Tyber trembled underneath his banks
To hear the replication of your sounds,

Made

Made in his concave shores ?
And do you now put on your best attire ?
And do you now cull out an holiday ?
And do you now strew flowers in his way,
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood ?
Begone——
Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
Pray to the Gods to intermit the plague
That needs must light on this ingratitude.

The next speech expresses the general apprehension of Cæsar's assuming too great a degree of power.

FLAVIUS.

Let no images
Be hung with Cæsar's trophies. I'll about,
And drive away the vulgar from the streets :
So do you too, where you perceive them thick.
These growing feathers, pluckt from Cæsar's wing,
Will make him fly an ordinary pitch ;
Who else would soar above the view of men,
And keep us all in servile fearfulness.

The second scene is the course at the Lupercal games, in which Antony appears the humble courtier of Cæsar. A soothsayer bids him beware the Ides of March.

In

together to do honour to Cæsar's triumph. As certain decorums were unknown to the writers of Shakspeare's days, he suffers some poor mechanics to be too loquacious. As it was his business to depress the character of Cæsar, and render his victory over his illustrious rival as odious as possible, he judiciously makes one of the Tribunes thus address himself to the people :

MARULLUS.

Wherefore rejoice ? what conquest brings he home ?
What tributaries follow him to Rome,
To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels ?
You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things,
O you hard hearts ! you cruel men of Rome !
Knew you not Pompey ? Many a time and oft
Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The live-long day with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome ;
And when you saw his chariot but appear,
Have you not made an universal shout,
That Tyber trembled underneath his banks
To hear the replication of your sounds,

Made

Made in his concave shores ?
And do you now put on your best attire ?
And do you now cull out an holiday ?
And do you now strew flowers in his way,
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood ?
Begone——
Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
Pray to the Gods to intermit the plague
That needs must light on this ingratitude.

The next speech expresses the general apprehension of Cæsar's assuming too great a degree of power.

FLAVIUS.

Let no images
Be hung with Cæsar's trophies. I'll about,
And drive away the vulgar from the streets :
So do you too, where you perceive them thick.
These growing feathers, pluckt from Cæsar's wing,
Will make him fly an ordinary pitch ;
Who else would soar above the view of men,
And keep us all in servile fearfulness.

The second scene is the course at the Lupercal games, in which Antony appears the humble courtier of Cæsar. A soothsayer bids him beware the Ides of March.

In

In the third scene there is a dialogue between Brutus and Cassius, in which the latter tenderly reproaches Brutus, that his countenance is not so open and cordial to him as formerly; to this the other replies, he has some inward discontent,

And that poor Brutus, with himself at war,
Forgets the shews of love to other men.

This intimation of discontent encourages Cassius to try to incense Brutus against the growing power of Cæsar. On the shouts of the mob, Brutus expresses his fear that they are making Cæsarking; this encourages Cassius to proceed in his design. He makes two speeches, in which he appears envious and malignant to Cæsar, of whom he speaks as men do, who, unwilling to confess the qualities that give superiority to a rival, dwell with malice on those petty circumstances, by which he is not distinguished from ordinary men. The French critic is much offended at this scene, and says, it is not in the style of great men. The language of envy is always low. The speeches of Cassius express well his envious and peevish temper,

temper, and make him a foil to set off to advantage the more noble mind of Brutus. Cassius endeavours to stimulate Brutus to oppose the encroachments of Cæsar on the liberty of Rome, by setting before him its first deliverer, the great Junius Brutus; a name revered by every Roman, but undoubtedly adored by his descendants.

This is truly imitation, when the poet gives us the just copies of all circumstances that accompanied the action he represents. Corneille's dramas are fantastic compositions, void of historical truth, imitation of character, or representation of manners. Some few lines from Seneca, ingrafted into the *Cinna*, have given it reputation. For, however custom may have taught a very ingenious and polite people to endure the insipid scenes of *l'amoureux et l'amoureuse*, the fault has been in the poets, not the spectators: all their critics have strongly condemned this mode of writing; and the public, by its approbation of this piece on account of the scenes between Augustus and *Cinna*, shews plainly how much dialogues
of

of a noble and manly kind would please. Unhappily, Seneca's Augustus makes the Cinna of Corneille appear too mean and little. These borrowed ornaments never will assort perfectly well with the piece; they break in upon the harmony of sentiment, and the proportion of characters, and fall greatly short of the easy propriety, and becoming grace, of a perfect set of imitations designed for and fitted to the work, as in this tragedy of Julius Cæsar, where all the characters appear in due degrees of subordination to the hero of the piece. Our Poet, to interest us the more for Brutus, takes every occasion to make Cassius a foil for him. In the next scene he is represented by Cæsar in an unamiable light; the opportunity of so fit an occasion is taken, to make some fine reflections on the malignant and envious nature of men, not softened by the joys of mirth, and the endearing intercourse of social pleasures.

CÆSAR. (*To ANTONY, apart.*)

Let me have men about me that are fat,

Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep a-nights:

Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look ;
He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.

ANTONY.

Fear him not, Cæsar, he's not dangerous ;
He is a noble Roman, and well given.

CÆSAR.

Would he were fatter. But I fear him not :
Yet if my name were liable to fear,
I do not know the man I should avoid,
So soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much ;
He is a great observer ; and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays,
As thou do'st, Antony ; he hears no musick ;
Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort,
As if he mock'd himself, and scorn'd his spirit,
That could be mov'd to smile at any thing.
Such men as he be never at heart's ease,
Whilst they behold a greater than themselves ;
And therefore are they very dangerous.

Casca's blunt recital of the offer of a crown to Cæsar, in the next scene, is much censured by the critic, accustomed to the decorums of the French theatre. It is not improbable the poet might have in his eye some person of eminence in his days, who
was

was distinguished by such manners. Many allusions and imitations which please at the time, are lost to posterity, unless they point at transactions and persons of the first consequence. Whether we approve such a character on the stage or not, we must allow his narration represents the designs of Cæsar's party, and the aversion of the Roman people to that royalty, which he affected ; and it was right to avoid engaging the parties in more deep discourse, as Shakspeare intended, by a sort of historical process, to shew how Brutus was led on to that act, to which his nature was averse.

The first scene of the second act presents Brutus debating with himself, upon the point on which Cassius had been urging him. Cassius in his soliloquy, scene third, act first, seems to intimate, that resentment had a share in his desire to take off Cæsar. Brutus, on the contrary, informs us, that no personal motives sway him, but such as are derived from an hereditary aversion to tyranny, and the pledge, which the virtue of his ancestors had given the commonwealth, that a Bru-

tus would not suffer a king in Rome ; these considerations compel him to take the following resolution :

BRUTUS.

It must be by his death ; and, for my part,
I know no personal cause to spurn at him ;
But for the general. He would be crown'd :
How that might change his nature, there's the question.
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder ;
And that craves wary walking : Crown him—that—
And then I grant we put a sting in him,
That at his will we may do danger with.
Th' abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins
Remorse from power : and to speak truth of Cæsar,
I have not known when his affections sway'd
More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof,
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber upward turns his face :
But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Cæsar may ;
Then lest he may, prevent.

How averse he is to the means, by which
he

he is to deliver his country from the danger apprehended, appears in the following words :

BRUTUS.

Since Cassius first did whet me against Cæsar,
I have not slept.

Between the acting of a dreadful thing,

And the first motion, all the interim is

Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream :

The genius, and the mortal instruments,

Are then in council ; and the state of man,

Like to a little kingdom, suffers then

The nature of an insurrection.

Disguise and concealment are so abhorrent from the open ingenuousness of his nature, that righteous as he thinks the cause, in which he is going to engage, on hearing his friends are come to him muffled up at midnight, he cannot help breaking out in the following manner :

BRUTUS.

O Conspiracy !

Sham'st thou to shew thy dang'rous brow by night,

When evils are most free ? O then, by day

Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough,

To

To mask thy monstrous visage ? Seek none, Conspiracy,
Hide it in smiles and affability ;
For if thou put thy native semblance on,
Not Erebus itself were dim enough
To hide thee from prevention.

Brutus rises far above his friend and associate Cassius, when, with a noble disdain, he rejects his proposal of swearing to their resolution.

BRUTUS.

No, not on oath. If not the face of men,
The sufferance of our souls, the time's abuse,
If these be motives weak, break off betimes,
And ev'ry man hence to his idle bed ;
So let high-sighted tyranny rage on,
Till each man drop by lottery. But if these,
As I am sure they do, bear fire enough
To kindle cowards, and to steel with valour
The melting spirits of women ; then, countrymen,
What need we any spur, but our own cause,
To prick us to redress ? what other bond,
Than secret Romans, that have spoke the word,
And will not palter ? and what other oath,
Than honesty to honesty engag'd,

That

That this shall be, or we will fall for it ?

Swear priests, and cowards, and men cautelous,

Old feeble carrions, and such suffering souls

That welcome wrongs : unto bad causes swear

Such creatures as men doubt ; but do not stain

The even virtue of our enterprise,

Nor th' insuppressive mettle of our spirits,

To think, that or our cause, or our performance,

Did need an oath ; when every drop of blood

That every Roman bears, and nobly bears,

Is guilty of a several bastardy,

If he doth break the smallest particle

Of any promise that hath past from him.

Is it not wonderful to see a poor player thus ennoble the sentiments, and give full expansion to the magnanimity of the man styled the Deliverer of Rome ?

Mr. Voltaire is so little sensible of the noble delicacy of this speech, that he says the conspirators are not Romans, but a parcel of country-fellows of a former age who conspire in a tippling-house.—Surely there is no partiality in saying our author has given to Brutus Roman sentiments, with a tincture of the Platonic philosophy ; and, besides

besides these more general characteristics, has added many nice touches, which specify his personal qualities. We behold on the stage the Marcus Brutus of Plutarch rendered more amiable and more interesting. A peculiar gentleness of manners, and delicacy of mind, distinguish him from all the other conspirators ; and we cannot refuse to concur with the confession of his enemies, and the words of Antony.

ANTONY.

This was the noblest Roman of them all :
 All the conspirators, save only he,
 Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar ;
 He, only, in a general honest thought,
 And common good to all, made one of them.
 His life was gentle, and the elements
 So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up,
 And say to all the world, *This was a man !*

The following soliloquy, prophetic of the civil war, subsequent to the death of Cæsar, spoken by Antony addressing himself to the dead body, is sublime and solemn.

ANTONY.

O pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,

That

That this shall be, or we will fall for it ?
Swear priests, and cowards, and men cautelous,
Old feeble carrions, and such suffering souls
That welcome wrongs : unto bad causes swear
Such creatures as men doubt ; but do not stain
The even virtue of our enterprise,
Nor th' insuppressive mettle of our spirits,
To think, that or our cause, or our performance,
Did need an oath ; when every drop of blood
That every Roman bears, and nobly bears,
Is guilty of a several bastardy,
If he doth break the smallest particle
Of any promise that hath past from him.

Is it not wonderful to see a poor player thus
ennoble the sentiments, and give full expansion
to the magnanimity of the man styled
the Deliverer of Rome ?

Mr. Voltaire is so little sensible of the
noble delicacy of this speech, that he says
the conspirators are not Romans, but a parcel
of country-fellows of a former age who
conspire in a tippling-house.—Surely there
is no partiality in saying our author has
given to Brutus Roman sentiments, with a
tincture of the Platonic philosophy ; and,
besides

besides these more general characteristics, has added many nice touches, which specify his personal qualities. We behold on the stage the Marcus Brutus of Plutarch rendered more amiable and more interesting. A peculiar gentleness of manners, and delicacy of mind, distinguish him from all the other conspirators ; and we cannot refuse to concur with the confession of his enemies, and the words of Antony.

ANTONY.

This was the noblest Roman of them all :
All the conspirators, save only he,
Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar ;
He, only, in a general honest thought,
And common good to all, made one of them.
His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up,
And say to all the world, *This was a man !*

The following soliloquy, prophetic of the civil war, subsequent to the death of Cæsar, spoken by Antony addressing himself to the dead body, is sublime and solemn.

ANTONY.

O pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,

That

That I am meek and gentle with these butchers.
Thou art the ruins of the noblest man,
That ever lived in the tide of times.
Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood !
Over thy wounds now do I prophesy,
Which, like dumb mouths, do ope their ruby lips,
To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue,
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men ;
Domestic fury, and fierce civil strife,
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy ;
Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
And dreadful objects so familiar,
That mothers shall but smile, when they behold
Their infants quarter'd with the hands of War :
All pity choak'd with custom of fell deeds ;
And Cæsar's spirit raging for revenge.
With Até by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice,
Cry Havock, and let slip the dogs of war.

This speech shews the secret enmity Antony bears to the conspirators, and prepares us for the inflammatory oration, which at the obsequies of Cæsar he pronounces before the people.—I shall cite it at length, for as this tragedy has been brought by Mr.
Voltaire

Voltaire into a comparison with the Cinna of Corneille, and he is pleased to call our English piece a monstrous spectacle, and takes not the least notice of a speech which may be considered as one of the finest pieces of rhetoric that is extant, I am desirous to set it before the reader. It is presumed that he will hardly find any thing monstrous in its form, or absurd in its matter, but quite the reverse. I suppose a popular address and manner, in an oration designed for the populace, would be deemed the most proper by the best critics in the art of rhetoric.

ANTONY.

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him.

The evil that men do, lives after them,

The good is oft interred with their bones ;

So let it be with Cæsar ! Noble Brutus

Hath told you, Cæsar was ambitious :

If it were so, it was a grievous fault,

And grievously hath Cæsar answer'd it.

Here, under leave of Brutus, and the rest,

(For Brutus is an honourable man,

So are they all, all honourable men,)

R

Come

Come I to speak in Cæsar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me ;
But Brutus says, he was ambitious ;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill ;
Did this in Cæsar seem ambitious ?
When that the poor have cry'd, Cæsar hath wept ;
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff,
Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honourable man.
You all did see, that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition ?
Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious ;
And, sure, he is an honourable man.
I speak not, to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once,—not without cause ;
What cause with-holds you then to mourn for him ?
O judgment ! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me.
My heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.

1 PLEBEIAN.

Methinks, there is much reason in his sayings, &c.

ANTONY.

ANTONY.

But yesterday the word of Cæsar might
Have stood against the world ; now lies he there,
And none so poor to do him reverence.
O masters ! if I were to dispos'd to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,
Who, you all know, are honourable men.
I will not do them wrong : I rather choose
To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,
Than I will wrong such honourable men.
But here's a parchment, with the seal of Cæsar,
I found it in his closet, 'tis his will ;
Let but the commons hear this testament,
(Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read,)
And they would go and kiss dead Cæsar's wounds,
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood :
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their issue.

4 PLEBEIAN.

We'll hear the will ; read it, Mark Antony.

ALL.

The will the will. We will hear Cæsar's will.

ANTONY.

Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read it ;

It is not meet you know how Cæsar lov'd you.

You are not wood, you are not stones, but men ;

And, being men, hearing the will of Cæsar,

It will inflame you, it will make you mad.

'Tis good you know not, that you are his heirs ;

For if you should, O what would come of it ?

4 PLEBEIAN.

Read the will, we will hear it, Antony, &c.

ANTONY.

Will you be patient ? will you stay a while ?

I have o'ershot myself, to tell you of it.

I fear, I wrong the honourable men,

Whose daggers have stabb'd Cæsar. I do fear it.

4 PLEBEIAN.

They were traitors, &c.

ANTONY.

You will compel me then to read the will ?

Then make a ring about the corpse of Cæsar,

And let me shew you him, that made the will.

Shall I descend ? and will you give me leave ?

ALL.

Come down.

3 PLEBEIAN.

You shall have leave.

ANTONY.

If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.

You

You all do know this mantle; I remember
The first time ever Cæsar put it on,
'Twas on a summer's evening in his tent,
That day he overcame the Nervii.
Look! in this place ran Cassius' dagger through;
See, what a rent the envious Casca made;
Through this, the well-beloved Brutus stabb'd;
And as he pluck'd his cursed steel away,
Mark, how the blood of Cæsar follow'd it!
As rushing out of doors, to be resolv'd,
If Brutus so unkindly knock'd, or no:
For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar's angel,
Judge, oh you gods! how dearly Cæsar lov'd him:
This was the most unkindest cut of all;
For when the noble Cæsar saw him stab,
Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
Quite vanquish'd him; then burst his mighty heart;
And, in his mantle muffling up his face,
Even at the base of Pompey's statue,
Which all the while ran blood, great Cæsar fell.
O what a fall was there, my countrymen!
Then I, and you, and all of us fell down;
Whilst bloody treason flourish'd over us.
O, now you weep! and I perceive you feel
The dint of pity; these are gracious drops.
Kind souls! what, weep you when you but behold

Our

Our Cæsar's vesture wounded! look you here!

Here is himself, marr'd as you see by traitors.

I PLEBEIAN.

O piteous spectacle!

ANTONY.

Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up

To such a sudden flood of mutiny:

They that have done this deed are honourable.

What private griefs they have, alas! I know not,

That made them do it; they are wise and honourable;

And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.

I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts

I am no orator, as Brutus is,

But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man

That love my friend; and that they know full well,

That give me public leave to speak of him;

For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,

Action nor utt'rance, nor the power of speech,

To stir men's blood; I only speak right on.

I tell you that which you yourselves do know;

Shew you sweet Cæsar's wounds, poor, poor, dumb
mouths!

And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,

And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony

Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue

In every wound of Cæsar, that should move

The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

ALL.

ALL.

We'll mutiny.——

ANTONY.

Why, friends, you go to do you know not what.

Wherein hath Cæsar thus deserv'd your loves?

Alas! you know not. I must not tell you then.

You have forgot the will I told you of.

ALL.

Most true,—the will.—Let's stay, and hear the will.

ANTONY.

Here is the will, and under Cæsar's seal.

To every Roman citizen he gives,

To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.

2 PLEBEIAN.

Most noble Cæsar!

ANTONY.

Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,

His private arbours, and new-planted orchards,

On that side Tiber; he hath left them you

And to your heirs for ever; common pleasures,

To walk abroad, and recreate yourselves.

Here was a Cæsar!

Is there any oration extant, in which the topics are more skilfully selected for the minds and temper of the persons, to whom it is spoken? Does it not by the most gentle gradations

gradations arrive at the point to which it was directed? Antony first soothes his audience by assuring them, that Cæsar loved the poor, and sympathized with their distresses: by reminding them, that he had rejected the proffered crown, he removes, from their shallow understandings, all apprehension of that ambition in him, which the conspirators alledged as the motive of their act: after these managements he proceeds further, and tells them of the Will. There is a delicate touch in the observation, that Cæsar received the mortal wound in the very mantle he wore the day in which he had gained a victory over the Nervii, the fiercest of their enemies. He excites tender pity, by mentioning the stab given by his beloved Brutus. The remark that he fell as a victim at the feet of Pompey's statue, whom the lower sort considered as of a party unfavourable to them, is another happy stroke in this piece. I am sorry that I must differ from the opinion of our commentator, who thinks the words "O what a fall was there!" related to that circumstance: it seems rather to refer to what immediately follows:

ANTONY.

ANTONY.

'Then I, and you, and all of us fell down :

Whilst bloody treason flourish'd over us.

Meaning how the general state of the republic was affected by the fall of so great a man. As the illiterate people are afraid of being imposed upon by the arts of the learned and the eloquent, he very judiciously assures them he is no orator. The refinements of the French theatre, possibly, would not endure the mob of plebeians, that appear in this scene. The fickle humour of the people, and the influence of eloquence upon their minds, are truly exhibited ; and I must own, as the imitation is so just, though the original may be called mean, I think it is not to be entirely condemned : one might perhaps wish the part of the mob had been shorter. The miserable conceit of Cæsar's blood rushing out of the wound, to ask who so unkindly knocked, is indefensible. The repetition of the words, honourable men, is perhaps too frequent, as at last it is too apparently ironical.

The oration of Brutus, in many parts, is
quaint

quaint and affected ; an unhappy attempt, as the learned commentator observes, to imitate that brevity and simplicity of expression, of which this noble Roman was a professed admirer. Our author, who followed with great exactness every circumstance mentioned in Plutarch, would probably have attempted to give to Antony the pomp of Asiatic eloquence, if his good sense had not informed him, that, to be pathetic, it is necessary to be simple.

The quarrel between Brutus and Cassius does not by any means deserve the ridicule thrown upon it by the French critic. The characters of the men are well sustained. It is natural, it is interesting ; but it rather retards than brings forward the catastrophe, and is useful only in setting Brutus in a good light. A sublime genius, in all its operations, sacrifices little things to great, and parts to the whole. Modern criticism dwells on minute articles. The principal object of our Poet was to interest the spectator for Brutus ; to do this he was to shew, that his temper was the farthest imaginable
from

from any thing ferocious or sanguinary ; and by his behaviour to his wife, his friends, his servants, to demonstrate, that out of respect to public liberty, he made as difficult a conquest over his natural disposition, as his great predecessor had done for the like cause over natural affection. Clemency and humanity add lustre to the greatest hero ; but here these sentiments determine the whole character of the man and the colour of his deed. The victories of Alexander, Hannibal, and Cæsar, whether their wars were just or unjust, must obtain for them the laurel wreath, which is the ambition of conquerors : but the act of Brutus, in killing Cæsar, was of such an ambiguous kind, as to receive its denomination from the motive by which it was suggested : it is that which must fix upon him the name of patriot or assassin. Our author, therefore, shews great judgment in taking various opportunities to display the softness and gentleness of Brutus : the little circumstance of his forbearing to awaken the servant who was playing to him on the lute, is very beautiful ; for one cannot conceive, that he
whose

whose tender humanity respected the slumber of his boy Lucilius, would from malice or cruelty have cut short the important and illustrious course of Cæsar's life.

Shakspeare seems to have aimed at giving an exact representation on the stage, of all the events and characters comprehended in Plutarch's life of Marcus Brutus; and he has wonderfully executed his plan. One may perhaps wish, that a writer, possessed of all the magic of poetical powers, had not so scrupulously confined himself within the limits of true history. The regions of imagination, in which the poet is allowed an arbitrary sway, seems his proper dominion. There he reigns like Pluto over shadows huge and terrible, of mighty and august appearance, but yielding and unresisting. The terra firma of real life, and the open daylight of truth, forbid many pleasing delusions, and produce difficulties too stubborn to yield to his art. On this solid foundation, however, our author knew he could always establish a strong interest for his piece. Great knowledge of the human heart had informed

ed

ed him, how easy it is to excite a sympathy with things believed real. He knew too, that curiosity is a strong appetite, and that every incident connected with a great event, and every particularity belonging to a great character, engages the spectator. He wrote to please an untaught people, guided wholly by their feelings, and to those feelings he applied : and they are often touched by circumstances that have not dignity and splendour enough to please the eye accustomed to the specious miracles of ostentatious art, and the nice selection of refined judgment. If we blame his making the tragic muse too subservient to the historical, we must at least allow it to be much less hurtful to the effect of his representation upon the passions, than the liberties taken by many poets to represent well-known characters and events, in lights so absolutely different from whatsoever universal fame, and the testimony of ages, had taught us to believe of them, that the mind resists the new impression attempted to be made upon it. Shakspeare, perhaps not injudiciously, thought that it was more the business of the
dramatic

dramatic writer to excite sympathy than admiration; and that to acquire an empire over the passions, it was well worth while to relinquish some pretensions to excellencies of less efficiency on the stage.

As it was Shakspeare's intention to make Brutus his hero, he has given a disadvantageous representation of Cæsar, and thrown an air of pride and insolence into his behaviour, which is intended to create an apprehension in the spectator of his disposition to tyrannize over his fellow-citizens. In this haughty style he answers the petitions of Metellus Cimber, and the other conspirators, for the repeal of Publius Cimber's banishment: the speech suits the purpose of the poet, but is very blameable if compared with the historical character of the speaker, which ought certainly to have been more attended to. It will divert the English reader to see what Mr. Voltaire assures us to be a faithful translation of this speech; and I will therefore give the original and translation. When Metellus is going to fall at Cæsar's feet, he says to him:

CÆSAR.

CÆSAR.

I must prevent thee, Cimber.

These crouchings and these lowly curtesies
Might fire the blood of ordinary men,
And turn pre-ordinance and first decree
Into the law of children. Be not fond,
To think that Cæsar bears such rebel blood,
That will be thaw'd from the true quality
With that which melteth fools ; I mean, sweet words,
Low-crooked curt'sies, and base spaniel-fawning.
Thy brother by decree is banish'd ;
If thou dost bend, and pray, and fawn for him,
I spurn thee like a cur out of my way.
Know, Cæsar doth not wrong ; nor without cause
Will he be satisfied.

CÆSAR.

Cimber, je t'avertis que ces prosternemens,
Ces génuflexions, ces basses flateries,
Peuvent sur un cœur foible avoir quelque pouvoir,
Et changer quelquefois l'ordre éternel des choses
Dans l'esprit des enfans ; ne t' imagine pas
Que le sang de César puisse se fondre ainsi.
Les prières, les cris, les vaines simagrées,
Les airs d'un chien couchant peuvent toucher un sot ;
Mais le cœur de César résiste à ces bassesses.
Par un juste décret ton frère est exilé.

Flate, prie à genoux, & léche moi les pieds ;
Va, je te rosserai comme un chien ; loin d'ici.
Lorsque César fait tort, il a toujours raison.

Ben Jonson, by a faulty transcript of this speech, or the blunder of a player, had been led into the mistake of charging Shakspeare with the absurdity of making Cæsar say, he never did wrong without just cause : and Mr. Voltaire has seized on this false accusation.—It is perfectly apparent to any person who understands English, that Cæsar by pre-ordinance and first decree means that ordinance and first decree which he had before past for Cimber's banishment. And he says, I will not be prevailed upon, by these prostrations and prayers of yours, to turn my decrees into such momentary laws as children make. If there had been any doubt of his meaning, the latter part would have cleared it.

CÆSAR.

I was constant, Cimber should be banish'd ;
And constant do remain to keep him so.

It is surprizing, that some friend did not prevent the critic from falling into so strange
a blunder,

a blunder, about changing the eternal order in the minds of children. Many of his countrymen understand our language very well, and could easily have explained to him the signification of the preposition *into*, and that to change *into* always signifies to convert from one thing to another. Sweet words, crooked curtsies, and base fawnings, he translates, the airs of a setting dog. *Lecher les pieds* is not a proper translation of to fawn. Fawning courtiers would be strangely rendered by feet-licking courtiers; a fawning style, afawning address, are common expressions; but did any one ever think of a feet-licking style? a feet-licking address? Nor is *Je te rosserai* a juster translation of *I will spurn thee*: the first being a very low phrase; and to spurn is in our language a very noble one, and not unfit for the highest poetry or eloquence; indeed is oftener so used than in ordinary discourse.

Mr. Rowe, in the Fair Penitent, makes Horatio say to Lothario,

I hold thee base enough

To break through law, and *spurn at sacred order*.

S

If

If Mr. Voltaire should translate these words, he would triumph much that one of our most elegant poets talked of *drubbing* sacred order. The translator seems not even to know the English prosodia; for in translating Porcia's words,

PORCIA.

If it be no more,

Porcia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife,

he puts in a note upon harlot, to assure us that the word in the original is w——; which, if he understood our blank-verse, he would know could not make up the metre.

Mr. Voltaire formerly understood the English language tolerably well. His translation of part of Antony's speech to the people, in his own play of the death of Julius Cæsar, though far inferior to the original, is pretty good; and in his tragedy of Junius Brutus he has improved upon the Brutus of our old poet Lee: he has followed the English poet in making the daughter of Tarquin seduce the son of Junius Brutus
into

into a scheme for the restoration of her father; but with great judgment has imitated only what was worthy of imitation; and by the strength of his own genius, has rendered his piece much more excellent than that of Mr. Lee.

It must be allowed that Mr. Voltaire, in his translation of Shakspeare, has nobly emulated those interpreters of Homer, who, Mr. Pope tells us, misunderstand the text, and then triumph in the awkwardness of their own translations. To shew he decides with the same judgment and candour with which he translates, it will be necessary to present the sentence he has pronounced upon the genius of our great Poet. Speaking of Corneille he says, he was unequal like Shakspeare, and like him full of genius ; *mais le genie de Corneille était à celui de Shakespear, ce qu'un seigneur est à l'égard d'un homme au peuple né avec le même esprit que lui.* I have given his own words, because they do not carry any determinate sense. I conjecture they may be thus translated ; “The genius of Corneille is to that of Shakspeare,

S 2

speare, what a man of great rank is to one of the lower sort born with the same talents of mind."—When we speak of genius, we always mean that which is original and inherent, not any thing produced or derived from what is external. But Mr. Voltaire, by saying the genius of Corneille has that superiority over our countryman, which a person of rank has over a man in a low station, born with the same talents, perplexes the thing very much. It seems to carry the comparison from the genius, to the manner, of the writers.

If that manner is preferable, which gives the most becoming sentiments and the noblest character to the principal person of his drama, there is no doubt but our Poet has perfectly established his superiority over his competitor; for it cannot be denied, that Cinna is *un homme du peuple* (a low fellow), compared to Brutus.

Mr. Voltaire, in all the comparisons he has made between these authors, has not taken into the account that Shakspeare has
written

written the best comedy in our language: that the same man should have had such variety of talents, as to have produced Macbeth and the Merry Wives of Windsor, is astonishing. Where is there an instance, among the ancients or moderns, of one poet's uniting the sublime and pathetic, the boldest inventions of fiction, and the most just and accurate delineation of characters; and also possessing the *vis comica* in its highest perfection? The best French poets have been those

Who from the ancients like the ancients writ;

and who have aspired to the secondary praise of good imitators: but all our critics allow Shakspeare to be an original. Mr. Pope confesses him to be more so than even Homer himself. It has been demonstrated with great ingenuity and candour, that he was destitute of learning: the age was rude and void of taste; but what had a still more pernicious influence on his works, was, that the court and the universities, the statesmen and scholars, affected a scientific jargon. An obscurity of expression
was

was thought the veil of wisdom and knowledge: and that mist common to the morn and eve of literature, which in fact proves it is not at its high meridian, was affectedly thrown over the writings, and even the conversation of the learned, who often preferred images distorted or magnified, to a simple exposition of their thoughts. Shakspeare is never more worthy of the true critic's censure, than in those instances in which he complies with this false pomp of manner. It was pardonable in a man of his rank, not to be more polite and delicate than his contemporaries; but we cannot so easily excuse such superiority of talents for stooping to any affectation.

I may perhaps be charged with partiality to my author, for not having indulged that malignant spirit of criticism, which delights in exposing every blemish. I have passed over beauties and defects, in the same silence, where they have not essentially affected the great purposes of the Drama. They are of so palpable a nature, that the most inattentive reader must perceive them: the splendour of
his

his fine passages is equally striking. It appears to me that the dramatic requires a different species of criticism from any other poetry. A drama is to be considered in the light of a living body; regularity of features, grace of limbs, smoothness and delicacy of complexion, cannot render it perfect, if it is not properly organized within, as well as beautiful in its external structure. Many a character in a play, like a handsome person paralytic, is inert, feeble, and totally unfit for its duties and offices, so that its necessary exertions must be supplied by some substitute. The action is carried on much after the manner it is done in epic poetry, by the help of description and narration, and a series of detached parts.

It is unfair to judge singly of every line in a work where the merit depends on the result of various operations, and repeated efforts to obtain a particular end. Works without genius are usually regularly dull, and coldly correct, resembling those living characters that want, while

They

They dream the blank of life along,

Sense to be right, and passion to be wrong*.

Some allowances must be made to those who are more animated and more employed, if in the bustle of great actions, and the exertion of great powers, they fall into some little errors. The genius of Shakspeare is so extensive and profound, I have reason to fear a greater number of excellencies have escaped my discernment, than I have suffered faults to pass without my animadversion : but I hope this weak attempt to vindicate our great dramatic Poet, will excite some critic able to do him more ample justice. In that confidence I have left untouched many of his pieces, which deserve the protection of more judicious zeal, and skilful care.

* Dr. Young's Satires.

THREE
DIALOGUES
OF THE
DEAD.

DIAGNOSIS

Case No. 12345

The patient is a male, aged 45, who has been suffering from a chronic cough and expectoration of sputum for the past 10 years. The cough is worse in the morning and at night. The sputum is thick and yellowish. The patient also complains of shortness of breath and chest pain. He has lost weight and has a poor appetite. He has been treated with various antibiotics and cough syrups, but with no improvement. He has a long history of smoking and drinking alcohol.

On physical examination, the patient is thin and looks ill. He has a dry, hacking cough. The lungs are clear on auscultation. The heart is normal. The liver and spleen are not enlarged. The patient has a positive tuberculin skin test. The chest X-ray shows a normal heart size and clear lung fields. The sputum examination shows a positive result for acid-fast bacilli. The patient is diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis. He is started on a course of anti-tubercular therapy. He is advised to stop smoking and drinking alcohol. He is also advised to take good care of his general health and to get plenty of rest.

DIALOGUE I.

CADMUS—HERCULES.

HERCULES.

DO you pretend to sit as high on Olympus as Hercules? Did you kill the Nemean lion, the Erymanthian boar, the Lernean serpent, and the Stymphalian birds? Did you destroy tyrants and robbers? You value yourself greatly on subduing one serpent: I did as much as that, while I lay in my cradle.

CADMUS.

It is not on account of the serpent, that I boast myself a greater benefactor to Greece than you. Actions should be valued by their utility, rather than by their éclat. I taught Greece the art of writing, to which laws owe their precision and permanency. You subdued monsters; I civilized men. It is from untamed passions, not from wild beasts, that the greatest evils arise
to

to human society. By wisdom, by art, by the united strength of civil community, men have been enabled to subdue the whole race of lions, bears, and serpents, and, what is more, to bind in laws and wholesome regulations the ferocious violence and dangerous treachery of the human disposition. Had lions been destroyed only in single combat, men had had but a bad time of it; and what but laws could awe the men, who killed the lions? The genuine glory, the proper distinction of the rational species, arises from the perfection of the mental powers. Courage is apt to be fierce, and strength is often exerted in acts of oppression. But Wisdom is the associate of Justice; it assists her to form equal laws, to pursue right measures, to correct power, protect weakness, and to unite individuals in a common interest and general welfare. Heroes may kill tyrants; by it is wisdom, and laws that prevent tyranny and oppression. The operations of policy far surpass the labours of Hercules, preventing many evils which valour and might

might cannot even redress. You heroes consider nothing but glory, and hardly regard whether the conquests which raise your fame, are really beneficial to your country. Unhappy are the people who are governed by valour not directed by prudence, and not mitigated by the gentle arts!

HERCULES.

I do not expect to find an admirer of my strenuous life in the man who taught his countrymen to sit still and read, and to lose the hours of youth and action in idle speculation and the sport of words.

CADMUS.

An ambition to have a place in the registers of fame is the Eurystheus, which imposes heroic labours on mankind. The Muses incite to action, as well as entertain the hours of repose; and I think you should honour them for presenting to heroes such a noble recreation, as may prevent their taking up *the distaff*, when they laid down the club.

HERCULES.

Wits, as well as heroes, can take up *the*
5 *distaff.*

distaff. What think you of their thin-spun systems of philosophy, or lascivious poems, or Milesian fables? Nay, what is still worse, are there not panegyrics on tyrants, and books that blaspheme the gods, and perplex the natural sense of right and wrong? I believe if Eurystheus was to set me to work again, he would find me a worse task than any he imposed; he would make me read through a great library; and I would serve it as I did the Hydra: I would burn as I went on, that one Chimæra might not rise from another, to plague mankind. I should have valued myself more on clearing the library, than on cleansing the Augean stables.

CADMUS.

It is in those libraries only that the memory of your labours exists. The heroes of Marathon, the patriots of Thermopylæ owe their immortality to me. All the wise institutions of lawgivers, and all the doctrines of sages, had perished in the ear, like a dream related, if letters had not preserved them. Oh Hercules! it is not for the man who preferred virtue to pleasure, to be an
enemy

enemy to the Muses. Let Sardanapalus and the silken sons of luxury, who have wasted life in inglorious ease, despise the records of action, which bear no honourable testimony to their lives: but true merit, heroic virtue, each genuine offspring of immortal Jove, should honour the sacred source of lasting fame.

HERCULES.

Indeed, if writers employed themselves only in recording the acts of great men, much might be said in their favour. But why do they trouble people with their meditations? Can it signify to the world what an idle man has been thinking?

CADMUS.

Yes it may. The most important and extensive advantages mankind enjoy, are greatly owing to men who have never quitted their closets. To them mankind is obliged for the facility and security of navigation. The invention of the compass has opened to them new worlds. The knowledge of the mechanical powers has enabled them to construct such wonderful machines, as perform

form what the united labour of millions, by the severest drudgery, could not accomplish. Agriculture too, the most useful of arts, has received its share of improvement from the same source. Poetry likewise is of excellent use, to enable the memory to retain with more ease, and to imprint with more energy upon the heart, precepts of virtue and virtuous actions. Since we left the world; from the little root of a few letters, science has spread its branches over all nature, and raised its head to the heavens. Some philosophers have entered so far into the counsels of Divine Wisdom, as to explain to us many of its most stupendous operations. The dimensions, distances, and causes of the revolutions of the planets, the path of comets, and the ebbing and flowing of tides, are understood and laid open. Can any thing raise the glory of the human species more, than to see a little creature, inhabiting a small spot, amidst innumerable worlds, taking a survey of the universe, comprehending its arrangement, and entering into the scheme of that wonderful connexion and correspondence of things so remote,

mote,

mote, which infinite wisdom and power have combined to establish? What a volume of wisdom, what a noble theology do these discoveries open to us! While some superior geniuses have soared to these sublime subjects, other sagacious and diligent minds have been enquiring into the most minute works of the infinite Artificer: the same care, the same providence is exerted through the whole, and we should learn from it that to true Wisdom utility and fitness appear perfection, and whatever is beneficial is noble.

HERCULES.

I approve of science as far as it is assistant to action. I like the improvement of navigation, and the discovery of the greater part of the globe, because it opens a wider field for the master spirits of the world to bustle in.

CADMUS.

There spoke the soul of Hercules. But if learned men are to be esteemed for the assistance they give to active minds in their schemes, they are not less to be valued for their endeavours to give them a right direction,

rection, and moderate their too great ardour. The study of history will teach the warrior and the legislator, by what means armies have been victorious, and states have become powerful ; and in the private citizen they will inculcate the love of liberty and order. The writings of sages point out a private path of virtue, and shew that the best empire is self-government, and subduing our passions the noblest of conquests.

HERCULES.

The true spirit of heroism acts by a sort of inspiration, and wants neither the experience of history, nor the doctrines of philosophers to direct it. But do not arts and sciences render men effeminate, luxurious, and inactive ; and can you deny that wit and learning are often made subservient to very bad purposes?

CADMUS.

I will own that there are some natures so happily formed, they hardly want the assistance of a master, and the rules of art, to give them force or grace in every thing they do. But these heaven-inspired geniuses are few. As learning flourishes only where ease, plenty,

ty, and mild government subsist, in so rich a soil, and under so soft a climate, the weeds of luxury will spring up among the flowers of art ; but the spontaneous weeds would grow more rank, if they were allowed the undisturbed possession of the field. Letters keep a frugal temperate nation from growing ferocious, a rich one from becoming entirely sensual and debauched. Every gift of the Gods is sometimes abused ; but wit and fine talents by a natural law gravitate towards virtue : accidents may drive them out of their proper direction ; but such accidents are a sort of prodigies, and, like other prodigies, it is an alarming omen, and of dire portent to the times. For if Virtue cannot keep to her allegiance those men, who in their hearts confess her divine right, and know the value of her laws ; on whose fidelity and obedience can she depend ? May such geniuses never descend to flatter Vice, encourage Folly, or propagate Irreligion ; but exert all their powers in the service of Virtue, celebrate the noble choice of those, who, like you, preferred her to Pleasure !

DIALOGUE II.

MERCURY—and a modern Fine LADY.

Mrs. MODISH.

INDEED, Mr. Mercury, I cannot have the pleasure of waiting upon you now. I am engaged, absolutely engaged.

MERCURY.

I know you have an amiable affectionate husband, and several fine children; but you need not be told, that neither conjugal attachments, maternal affections, nor even the care of a kingdom's welfare or a nation's glory, can excuse a person who has received a summons to the realms of death. If the grim messenger was not as peremptory as unwelcome, Charon would not get a passenger, (except now and then an hypochondriacal Englishman) once in a century. You must be content to leave your husband and family, and pass the Styx.

Mrs. MODISH.

I did not mean to insist on any engagement

ment with my husband and children; I never thought myself engaged to them. I had no engagements, but such as were common to women of my rank. Look on my chimney-piece, and you will see I was engaged to the Play on Mondays, Balls on Tuesdays, the Opera on Saturdays, and to Card-assemblies the rest of the week, for two months to come; and it would be the rudest thing in the world, not to keep my appointments. If you will stay for me till the summer-season, I will wait on you with all my heart. Perhaps the Elysian fields may be less detestable than the country in our world. Pray have you a fine Vauxhall and Ranelagh? I think I should not dislike drinking the Lethè waters, when you have a full season.

MERCURY.

Surely you could not like to drink the waters of Oblivion, who have made pleasure the business, end, and aim of your life! It is good to drown cares; but who would wash away the remembrance of a life of gaiety and pleasure?

Mrs.

Mrs. MODISH.

Diversion was indeed the business of my life; but as to pleasure, I have enjoyed none, since the novelty of my amusements was gone off. Can one be pleased with seeing the same thing over and over again? Late hours and fatigue gave me the vapours, spoiled the natural cheerfulness of my temper, and even in youth wore away my youthful vivacity.

MERCURY.

If this way of life did not give you pleasure, why did you continue in it? I suppose you did not think it was very meritorious.

Mrs. MODISH.

I was too much engaged to think at all: so far indeed my manner of life was agreeable enough. My friends always told me diversions were necessary, and my doctor assured me dissipation was good for my spirits; my husband insisted that it was not, and you know that one loves to oblige one's friends, comply with one's doctor, and contradict one's husband; and besides,

sides, I was ambitious to be thought *du bon ton* *.

MERCURY.

Bon ton ! what is that, madam ! Pray define it.

Mrs. MODISH.

Oh sir, excuse me, it is one of the privileges of the *bon ton* never to define, or be defined. It is the child and the parent of jargon. It is—I can never tell you what it is: but I will try to tell you what it is not. In conversation it is not wit; in manners it is not politeness; in behaviour it is not address; but it is a little like them all. It can only belong to people of a certain rank, who live in a certain manner, with certain persons, who have not certain virtues, and who have certain vices, and who inhabit a certain part of the town. Like a place by courtesy, it gets a higher rank than the person can claim, but which those who have a legal title to precedence dare not dispute, for fear of being thought not

* *Du bon ton* is a cant phrase, in the modern French language, for the fashionable air of conversation and manners.

to understand the rules of politeness. Now, sir, I have told you as much as I know of it, though I have admired and aimed at it all my life.

MERCURY.

Then, madam, you have wasted your time, faded your beauty, and destroyed your health, for the laudable purposes of contradicting your husband, and being this something and this nothing called the *bon ton*.

Mrs. MODISH.

What would you have had me do?

MERCURY.

I will follow your mode of instructing. I will tell you what I would not have had you do. I would not have had you sacrifice your time, your reason, and your duties, to fashion and folly. I would not have had you neglect the happiness of your husband, and the education of your children.

Mrs. MODISH.

As to the education of my daughters, I spared no expence; they had a dancing-master, musick-master, and drawing-master; and a French governess to teach them behaviour and the French language.

MERCURY.

MERCURY.

So their religion, sentiments, and manners, were to be learnt from a dancing-master, musick-master, and a chambermaid! Perhaps such instructors might prepare them to catch the *bon ton*. Your daughters must have been so educated as to fit them to be wives without conjugal affection, and mothers without maternal care. I am sorry for the sort of life they are commencing, and for that which you have just concluded. Minos is a sour gentleman, without the least smattering of the *bon ton*, and I am in a fright for you. The best thing I can advise you is to do in this world, as you did in the other, keep happiness in your view, but never take the road that leads to it. Remain on this side Styx ; wander about without end or aim; look into the Elysian Fields, but never attempt to enter into them, lest Minos should push you into Tartarus : for the neglect of duties may bring on a sentence not much less severe, than the commission of crimes.

DIALOGUE

DIALOGUE III.

PLUTARCH—CHARON—and a
Modern BOOKSELLER.

CHARON.

HERE is a fellow who is very unwilling to land in our territories. He says he is rich, has a great deal of business in the other world, and must needs return to it: He is so troublesome and obstreperous I know not what to do with him. Take him under your care therefore, good Plutarch; you will easily awe him into order and decency by the superiority an Author has over a Bookseller.

BOOKSELLER.

Am I got into a world so absolutely the reverse of that I left, that here *Authors* domineer over *Booksellers*? Dear Charon, let me go back, and I will pay any price for my passage. But, if I must stay, leaveme not with any of those who are styled *Classical Authors*. As to you, Plutarch, I have a particular animosity against you, for having almost

most occasioned my ruin. When I first set up shop, understanding but little of business, I unadvisedly bought an edition of your *Lives*; a pack of old Greeks and Romans, which cost me a great sum of money. I could never get off above twenty sets of them. I sold a few to the Universities, and some to Eaton and Westminster; for it is reckoned a pretty book for boys and under-graduates; but, unless a man has the luck to light on a pedant, he shall not sell a set of them in twenty years.

PLUTARCH.

From the merit of the subjects, I had hoped another reception for my works. I will own indeed, that I am not always perfectly accurate in every circumstance, nor do I give so exact and circumstantial a detail of the actions of my heroes, as may be expected from a biographer who has confined himself to one or two characters. A zeal to preserve the memory of great men, and to extend the influence of such noble examples, made me undertake more than I could accomplish in the first degree of perfection: but surely the characters of my illustrious
men

men are not so imperfectly sketched, that they will not stand forth to all ages as patterns of virtue, and incitements to glory. My reflections are allowed to be deep and sagacious; and what can be more useful to a reader, than a wise man's judgment on a great man's conduct? In my writings you will find no rash censures, no undeserved encomiums, no mean compliance with popular opinions, no vain ostentation of critical skill, nor any affected *finesse*. In my parallels, which used to be admired as pieces of excellent judgment, I compare with perfect impartiality one great man with another, and each with the rule of justice. If indeed later ages have produced greater men and better writers, my heroes and my works ought to give place to them. As the world has now the advantage of much better rules of morality, than the unassisted reason of poor pagans could form, I do not wonder, that those vices, which appeared to us as mere blemishes in great characters, should seem most horrid deformities in the purer eyes of the present age: a delicacy I do not blame, but admire and commend. And I must cen-
sure

sure you for endeavouring, if you could publish better examples, to obtrude on your countrymen such as were defective. I rejoice at the preference which they give to perfect and unallayed virtue; and as I shall ever retain a high veneration for the illustrious men of every age, I should be glad you would give me some account of those persons, who in wisdom, justice, valour, patriotism, have eclipsed my Solon, Numa, Camillus, and other boasts of Greece or Rome.

BOOKSELLER.

Why, master Plutarch, you are talking Greek indeed. That work which repaired the loss I sustained by the costly edition of your books, was, *The Lives of the Highwaymen*: but I should never have grown rich, if it had not been by publishing *the Lives of men that never lived*. You must know, that though in all times it was possible to have a great deal of learning and very little wisdom, yet it is only by a modern improvement in the art of writing, that a man may read all his life and have no learning or knowledge at all; which begins to be an advantage of the greatest importance. There
is

is as natural a war between your men of science and fools, as between the cranes and the pigmies of old. Most of our young men having deserted to the fools, the party of the learned is near being beaten out of the field ; and I hope in a little while they will not dare to peep out of their forts and fastnesses at Oxford and Cambridge. There let them stay and study old musty moralists, till one falls in love with the Greek, another with the Roman virtue : but our men of the world should read our new books, which teach them to have no virtue at all. No book is fit for a gentleman's reading, which is not void of facts and of doctrines, that he may not grow a pedant in his morals or conversation. I look upon history (I mean real history) to be one of the worst kinds of study. Whatever has happened, may happen again ; and a well-bred man may unwarily mention a parallel instance he had met with in history, and be betrayed into the awkwardness of introducing into his discourse a Greek, a Roman, or even a Gothic name. But when a gentleman has spent his time in reading adventures that never occurred,

occurred, exploits that never were achieved, and events that not only never did, but never can happen, it is impossible that in life or in discourse he should ever apply them. *A secret history*, in which there is *no secret* and *no history*, cannot tempt indiscretion to blab or vanity to quote; and by this means modern conversation flows gentle and easy, unincumbered with matter and unburthened of instruction. As the present studies throw no weight or gravity into discourse and manners, the women are not afraid to read our books; which not only dispose to gallantry and coquetry, but give rules for them. Cæsar's Commentaries, and the account of Xenophon's Expedition, are not more studied by military commanders, than our novels are by the fair; to a different purpose indeed: for their military maxims teach to conquer, our's to yield; those inflame the vain and idle love of glory, these inculcate a noble contempt of reputation. The women have greater obligations to our writers than the men. By the commerce of the world, men might learn much of what they get from books; but the poor women, who in their early youth are confined and restrained,

strained,

strained, if it were not for the friendly assistance of books, would remain long in an insipid purity of mind, with a discouraging reserve of behaviour.

PLUTARCH.

As to your men who have quitted the study of virtue for the study of vice, useful truth for absurd fancy, and real history for monstrous fiction, I have neither regard nor compassion for them: but I am concerned for the women, who are betrayed into these dangerous studies: and I wish for their sakes I had expatiated more on the character of Lucretia and some other heroines.

BOOKSELLER.

I tell you, our women do not read in order to live or to die like Lucretia. If you would inform us, that a *billet-doux* was found in her cabinet after her death, or give a hint as if Tarquin really saw her in the arms of a slave, and that she killed herself not to suffer the shame of a discovery, such anecdotes would sell very well. Or if even by tradition, but better still, if *by papers in the Portian family*, you could shew some probability that Portia died of *dram-drinking*; you would oblige the world very much; for

for you must know, that next to new-invented characters, we are fond of new lights upon ancient characters ; I mean such lights as shew a reputed honest man to have been a concealed knave ; an illustrious hero a pitiful coward, &c. Nay, we are so fond of this kind of information, as to be pleased sometimes to see a character cleared from a vice or crime it has been charged with, provided the person concerned be actually dead. But in this case the evidence must be authentic, and amount to a demonstration ; in the other a detection is not necessary ; a slight suspicion will do, if it concerns a really good and great character.

PLUTARCH.

I am the more surprized at what you say of the taste of your contemporaries, as I met with a Frenchman who assured me, that less than a century ago he had written a much-admired life of Cyrus under the name of Artamenes, in which he ascribed to him far greater actions than those recorded of him by Xenophon and Herodotus ; and that many of the great heroes of history had been treated in the same manner ; that em-

U

pires

pires were gained and battles decided by the valour of a single man; imagination bestowing what nature has denied, and the system of human affairs has rendered impossible.

BOOKSELLER.

I assure you these books were very useful to the Authors, and their Booksellers; and for whose benefit beside should a man write? These romances were very fashionable, and had a great sale: they fell in luckily with the humour of the age.

PLUTARCH.

Monsieur Scuderi tells me they were written in the times of vigour and spirit, in the evening of the gallant days of chivalry, which, though then declining, had left in the hearts of men a warm glow of courage and heroism; and they were to be called to books, as to battles, by the sound of the trumpet: he says too, that if writers had not accommodated themselves to the prejudices of the age, and written of bloody battles and desperate encounters, their works would have been esteemed too effeminate an amusement for gentlemen. Histories of chivalry, instead of enervating, tend to invigorate

vigorate the mind, and endeavour to raise human nature above the condition, which is naturally prescribed to it; but as strict justice, patriot motives, prudent counsels, and a dispassionate choice of what upon the whole is fittest and best, do not direct these heroes of romance, they cannot serve for instruction and example, like the great characters of true history. It has ever been my opinion, that only the clear and steady light of truth can guide men to virtue, and that the lesson which is *impracticable*, must be *unuseful*. Whoever shall design to regulate his conduct by these visionary characters, will be in the condition of superstitious people, who choose rather to act by intimations they receive in the dreams of the night, than by the sober counsels of morning meditation. Yet I confess it has been the practice of many nations to incite men to *virtue* by relating the deeds of *fabulous heroes*; but surely it is the custom only of yours to incite them to *vice* by the history of *fabulous scoundrels*. Men of fine imagination have soared into the regions of fancy to bring back Astrea: you go thither in

search of Pandora ; Oh disgrace to letters !
Oh shame to the Muses !

BOOKSELLER.

You express great indignation at our present race of writers ; but believe me, the fault lies chiefly on the side of the readers. As Monsieur Scuderi observed to you, authors must comply with the manners and disposition of those who are to read them. There must be a certain sympathy between the book and the reader, to create a good liking. Would you present a modern fine gentleman, who is negligently lolling in an easy-chair, with the *Labours of Hercules* for his recreation ? or make him climb the Alps with Hannibal, when he is expiring with the fatigue of last night's ball ? Our readers must be amused, flattered, soothed ; such adventures must be offered to them as they would like to have a share in.

PLUTARCH.

It should be the first object of writers to correct the vices and follies of the age. I will allow as much compliance with the mode of the times, as will make truth and good morals agreeable. Your love of fictitious

titious characters might be turned to good purpose, if those presented to the public were to be formed on the rules of religion and morality. It must be confessed, that history, being employed only about illustrious persons, public events, and celebrated actions, does not supply us with such instances of domestic merit as one could wish: our heroes are great in the field and the senate, and act well in great scenes on the theatre of the world: but the idea of a man, who in the silent retired path of life never deviates into vice, who considers no spectator but *the Omniscient Being*, and solicits no applause but *His* approbation, is the noblest model that can be exhibited to mankind, and would be of the most general use. Examples of domestic virtue would be more particularly useful to women than those of great heroines. The virtues of women are blasted by the breath of public fame, as flowers that grow on an eminence are faded by the sun and wind, which expand them. But true female praise, like the music of the spheres, arises from a gentle, a constant, and an equal progress in the path marked

out for them, by their great Creator; and, like the heavenly harmony, it is not adapted to the gross ear of mortals, but is reserved for the delight of higher beings, by whose wise laws they were ordained to give a silent light, and shed a mild benignant influence on the world.

BOOKSELLER.

We have had some English and French writers who aimed at what you suggest. In the supposed character of *Clarissa* (said a clergyman to me a few days before I left the world) one finds the dignity of heroism tempered by the meekness and humility of religion, a perfect purity of mind and sanctity of manners; in that of *Sir Charles Grandison*, a noble pattern of every private virtue, with sentiments so exalted as to render him equal to every public duty.

PLUTARCH.

Are there no other authors who write in this manner?

BOOKSELLER.

Yes, we have another writer of these imaginary histories: one who has not long since descended to these regions: his name is
Fielding;

Fielding; and his works, as I have heard the best judges say, have a true spirit of comedy, and an exact representation of nature, with fine moral touches. He has not indeed given lessons of pure and consummate virtue; but he has exposed vice and meanness with all the powers of ridicule: and we have some other good wits, who have exerted their talents to the purposes you approve. Monsieur de Marivaux, and some other French writers, have also proceeded much upon the same plan, with a spirit and elegance which give their works no mean rank among the *belles lettres*. I will own that, when there is wit and entertainment enough in a book to make it sell, it is not the worse for good morals.

CHARON.

I think, Plutarch, you have made this gentleman a little more humble, and now I will carry him the rest of his journey. But he is too frivolous an animal to present to wise Minos. I wish Mercury were here; he would damn him for his dulness. I have a good mind to carry him to the Danaïdes, and leave him to pour water into their vessels,

sels, which, like his late readers, are destined to eternal emptiness. Or shall I chain him to the rock, side to side by Prometheus, not for having attempted to steal celestial fire, in order to animate human forms, but for having endeavoured to extinguish that which Jupiter had imparted? Or shall we constitute him *friseur* to Tisiphone, and make him curl up her locks with his satires and libels?

PLUTARCH.

The supreme and righteous Judge does not esteem any thing frivolous, that affects the morals of mankind. By his final sentence Authors will be punished as guilty of every fault they have countenanced, and every crime they have encouraged; and vengeance will be denounced in proportion to the injuries, which virtue or the virtuous have suffered in consequence of their writings.

FINIS.

HARDING and WRIGHT, Printers, St. John's Square, London.



out for them, by their great Creator; and, like the heavenly harmony, it is not adapted to the gross ear of higher beings, by served for the delight of higher beings, by whose wise laws they were ordained to give a silent light, and shed a mild benignant influence on the world.

BOOKSELLER.

We have had some English and French writers who aimed at what you suggest. In the supposed character of Clarissa (said some clergymen to me a few days before I left the world) one finds the dignity of heroism tempered by the meekness and humility of religion, a perfect purity of mind and sanctity of manners: in that of Sir Charles Grandison, a noble pattern of every private virtue, with sentiments so exalted as to render him equal to every public duty.

PLUTARCH.

Are there no other authors who write in this manner?

BOOKSELLER.

Yes, we have another writer of these imaginary histories; one who has not long since descended to these regions: his name is Fielding;

out for them, by their great Creator; and, like the heavenly harmony, it is not adapted to the gross ear of higher beings, by served for the delight of higher beings, by whose wise laws they were ordained to give a silent light, and shed a mild benignant influence on the world.

BOOKSELLER.

We have had some English and French writers who aimed at what you suggest. the supposed character of Clarissa (said clergymen to me a few days before I left the world) one finds the dignity of heroism tempered by the meekness and humility of religion, a perfect purity of mind and sanctity of manners: in that of Sir Charles Grandison, a noble pattern of every private virtue, with sentiments so exalted as to render him equal to every public duty.

PLUTARCH.

Are there no other authors who write in this manner?

BOOKSELLER.

Yes, we have another writer of these imaginary histories: one who has not long since descended to these regions: his name is Fielding;



Montagu, Elizabeth Robinson,

An essay on the writings and genius of Shakspeare compared with the greek
and french dramatic poets With some remarks upon the misrepresentations of
Mons. de Voltaire ; To which are added three dialogues of the dead

London 1810

P.o.angl. 373 h

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10750035-0